

# NISHAPUR

Some Early Islamic Buildings  
and Their Decoration

CHARLES K. WILKINSON

The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York

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PUBLISHED WITH THE AID OF A GRANT FROM  
**The Hagop Kevorkian Fund, New York**

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Map of the Near East drawn by Kathleen Borowik. Site plans drawn by Walter Hauser and inked by William Schenck. Drawings by Lindsley F. Hall, Walter Hauser, William Schenck, and Charles K. Wilkinson

All black-and-white photographs in this volume not otherwise credited were taken in Iran by Charles K. Wilkinson. The color photographs were made by Sheldon Collins, the Photograph Studio, The Metropolitan Museum of Art

Excavation photographs printed at specific scales were used to extrapolate approximate measurements for many Nishapur finds that are now inaccessible

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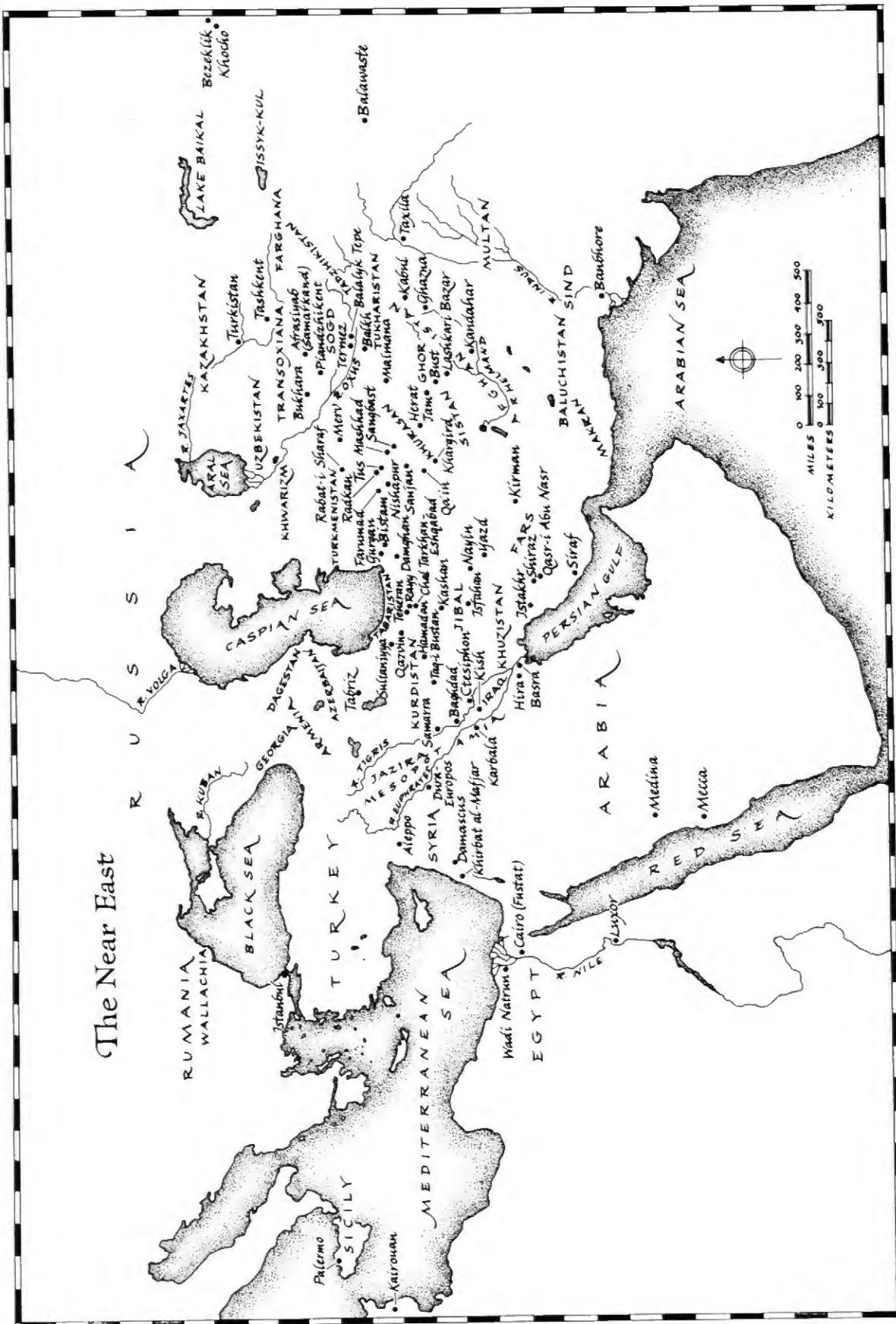
*To my wife,*  
**IRMA B. WILKINSON,**  
*whose patience and encouragement  
have sustained me*



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The Near East



# Director's Foreword

ONE OF THE GREATEST cities in medieval Iran was Nishapur, located in the eastern province of Khurasan. Historical records attesting to its immense importance as a center of Islamic culture made it a logical and promising site for excavation. Founded during the Sasanian dynasty (and given the name "New Shapur"), the city became the capital of the Tahirid dynasty in the ninth century and reached the height of its prosperity under the Samanids in the tenth century, when it served as the seat of the governor and commander in chief of the province. Nishapur retained its importance under the Seljuqs, after its occupation by the first sultan of this Turkic dynasty in 1037. It was sacked by the Ghuzz in 1153 and damaged in a series of earthquakes in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, yet it remained an active urban center until its utter destruction by the Mongols in 1221.

The site was chosen by the members of the Iranian Expedition of the Metropolitan Museum—Walter Hauser, Joseph M. Upton, and Charles K. Wilkinson—because, in addition to the political significance ascribed to it by medieval writers, Nishapur was a flourishing center for the arts and crafts as well as for trade. The Museum's excavations were conducted from 1935 to 1940, with a final season in 1947. Reports of the excavations appeared in the Museum's *Bulletin* in 1936 (September), 1937 (October), 1938 (November), and 1942 (April).

The Museum has always been eager to publish fully the results of these excavations, but due to the untimely death of Walter Hauser and a change of course in Joseph Upton's career, it fell to Charles Wilkinson to oversee the task. The project commenced with his 1973 study *Nishapur: Pottery of the Early Islamic Period*. There followed in 1982 a thorough discussion of the metalwork from the site, *Nishapur: Metalwork of the Early Islamic Period*, by James W. Allan of the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford. The third volume, dealing with the early Islamic buildings of Nishapur and associated wall decoration, was originally envisaged as the final volume in the series. However, the Islamic glassware merits separate treatment and will thus be the subject of a forthcoming monograph by Jens Kröger of the Museum für Islamische Kunst, Berlin-Dahlem.

It is greatly to be regretted that this is a posthumous volume. The manuscript was completed before Charles Wilkinson's death, however, and the book is an appropriate tribute to the man who contributed so much to the excavations, both as a participant and as the guiding spirit behind the publication of the finds. Charles Wilkinson's association with the Metropolitan Museum was long and productive, beginning in 1920 when he joined the Graphic Section of the Museum's Egyptian

Expedition and only ending with his death in April of 1986. During this long period he demonstrated his talents as artist, curator, and scholar. In addition to participating in many Museum-sponsored excavations, he was made curator in 1956 of the new Department of Ancient Near Eastern Art, which was combined with the Department of Islamic Art in 1959 under his direction. Following his retirement in 1963, he served first as Hagop Kevorkian Curator of Middle Eastern Art and Archaeology at the Brooklyn Museum and later as adjunct professor of Islamic art at Columbia University. To honor his memory, the Museum recently established The Charles K. Wilkinson Lecture Series. Each year, distinguished scholars will be invited to lecture on Egyptian, ancient Near Eastern, and Islamic subjects.

The Hagop Kevorkian Fund provided the support so essential for this publication. We applaud the Fund's longstanding commitment to the Museum's efforts to issue scholarly works on ancient Near Eastern and Islamic art, and we are deeply appreciative of its continuing generosity.

PHILIPPE DE MONTEBELLO  
*Director*  
*The Metropolitan Museum of Art*

## *Acknowledgments*

I AM GRATEFUL for the constant support of The Metropolitan Museum of Art, and for the generous help of the Hagop Kevorkian Fund, in my endeavors to put into print the photographs I made of the excavations in the ruin fields of Nishapur from 1935 to 1940 and during a short season in 1947, when the concession was formally returned to the Iranian government. In this volume, the third to report the finds of the Museum's expedition to Nishapur, more attention is given to the actual excavations, and the site plans made in the field by Walter Hauser, who based them on his own surveying, are published here for the first time. That Hauser died before work on this volume began was a loss indeed, not only in regard to the plans but also because it was he who organized the excavations. This book would more fittingly have been written by him, my own steady interest not making up for his competence.

Hauser's plans and virtually all of the drawings that he, Lindsley F. Hall (who joined the expedition for part of one season), and I did in the field have been carefully and painstakingly traced in ink or rendered in color by William Schenck of the Department of Egyptian Art at the Metropolitan Museum. Schenck also contributed several drawings of his own, most notably the series detailing the murals found at Tepe Madraseh, and I am grateful to him as well for his help with the not inconsiderable task of sorting and arranging the drawings and photographs for publication. Manuel Keene, formerly of the Museum's Department of Islamic Art and of the Kuwait National Museum, is thanked for his initial work on the illustrations. The staff of the Department of Islamic Art, including Stuart Cary Welch, Marie Lukens Swietochowski, Marilyn Jenkins, Carolyn Kane, and George Berard, could not have been kinder or more helpful. I am indebted to Annemarie Schimmel, of Harvard University and consultant to the Metropolitan Museum, Richard N. Frye of Harvard University, and James A. Bellamy of the University of Michigan for their assistance with reading inscriptions, and to Deborah Thompson for supplying me with copies of as yet unpublished photographs of the excavations at Rayy in the 1930s. I have also had many useful suggestions and references from J. Michael Rogers of the British Museum and Oliver Watson of the Victoria and Albert Museum, London. Galena Pugachenkova of the University of Tashkent and Boris Marshak of the Hermitage Museum, Leningrad, provided me with valuable reports of their work and that of their colleagues in Uzbekistan.

Thanks are due to the staff of the Museum's Editorial Department, in particular Polly Cone, for furthering and coordinating efforts to produce this book, to Peter Oldenburg, for a design that is especially suited to presenting the text and illustrations in a most practical format, and to Sue Potter, the editor, for her skills in

organization and for posing questions that if successfully answered would perhaps forestall inquiries from readers. I regret to say that after five decades and the loss of my two colleagues, Walter Hauser and Joseph M. Upton, the third member of the Iranian Expedition, all of the questions have not been answered. To have been able to do so completely, however, would have been to make this report of our excavations in Nishapur unique.

CHARLES K. WILKINSON  
*Curator Emeritus, Near Eastern Art*  
*The Metropolitan Museum of Art*

*Sharon, Connecticut, 1986*

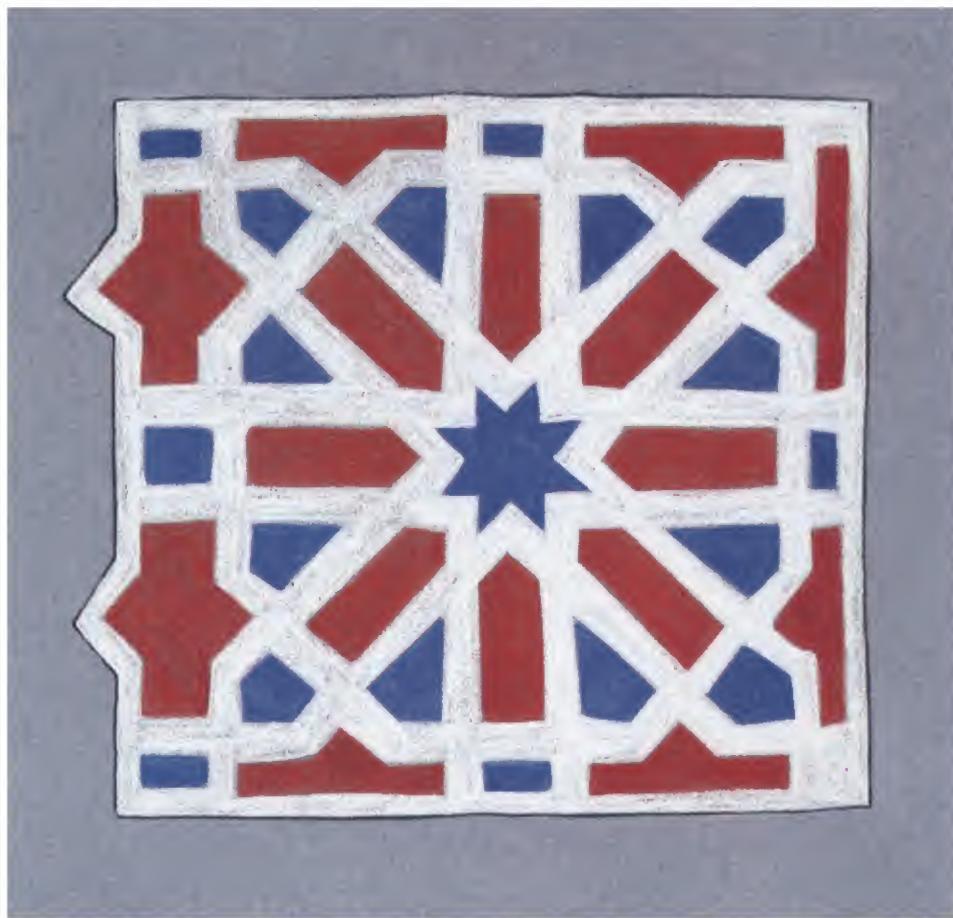
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*Editor's Note:* To publish these photographs recording the excavations at Nishapur and to make yet another group of the finds available to his friends and colleagues was Charles Wilkinson's ardent wish. His enthusiasm, for this as for any project he touched, was infectious. After countless hours spent listening to his stories of the dig, drawn from memories so fresh and vivid the events might have taken place a few months, not fifty years, ago, and poring with him over plans and photographs and text, I can almost, in my mind's eye, walk through the dusty ruins of medieval Nishapur. I am honored to have worked with Charles Wilkinson on what was to be the last of his many contributions to the study of Near Eastern art and culture, and it is with great sadness that I put the finishing touches on a volume that he will never see. I trust he would be pleased.

I wish to thank a number of people for the help they so willingly gave me, particularly in the last stages of preparing the manuscript for publication. Marie Lukens Swietochowski, Carolyn Kane, Marilyn Jenkins, and George Berard of the Department of Islamic Art were generous with their time and patient with my endless questions. John Carswell, director of the David and Alfred Smart Gallery at the University of Chicago, took time from a busy schedule to offer invaluable advice and comments on the final manuscript. William Schenck proved to be not only an accomplished draftsman but also immensely knowledgeable about the drawings and plans he worked on with Charles. Julie Rosenbaum and Marsha Selikoff searched out and organized photographs and drawings, tracked down references, and performed myriad other tasks that brought the book closer to completion. And, for graciously opening her home to me and allowing me to use Charles's library and papers, I am deeply grateful to Irma Wilkinson, to whom Charles has dedicated this book.

## COLORPLATES





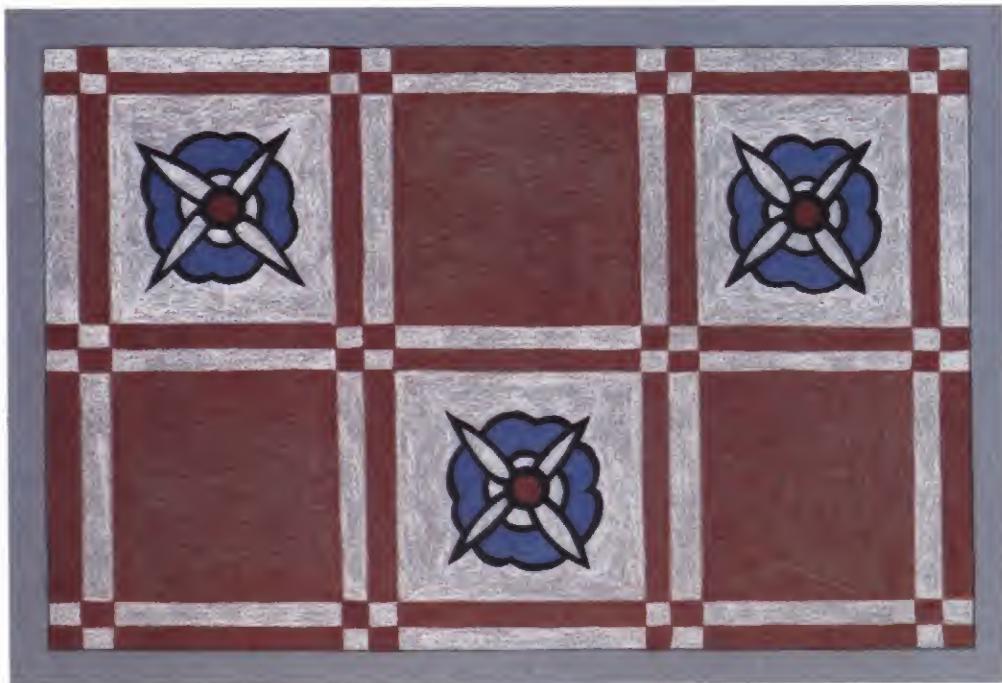
1

Pattern traced from a panel of carved and painted bricks from area B in Tepe Madraseh (see Figure 1.84). Height 47 cm. The Metropolitan Museum of Art (39.40.67). Original drawing by Charles K. Wilkinson, color tracing by William Schenck

2

Cornice from the Wart (see Figure 1.165). Restored. Carved and painted plaster. Height 16 cm, width 81.5 cm, depth 13.5 cm. The Metropolitan Museum of Art (40.170.267)







3

(*opposite top*) Pattern traced from painting discovered on the northwest and northeast walls in Tepe Madraseh, H4, above a plain dado 62.5 cm high that projected 1 cm from the wall surface. Height 17.4 cm, width 26.5 cm. Original drawing by Charles K. Wilkinson, color tracing by William Schenck

4

(*opposite bottom*) Pattern traced from painting found on a wall in the Vineyard Tepe, V16. Height 17 cm, width 34.5 cm. Original drawing by Charles K. Wilkinson, color tracing by William Schenck

5

(*above*) Painted plaster panel from the northeast jamb of the doorway on the southeast side of room S11 in Tepe Madraseh (see Figure 1.196). Height 70 cm, width 144 cm. The Metropolitan Museum of Art (40.170.177)



6

Painted plaster panel from the north-west wall of room W20 in Tepe Madraseh (see Figure 1.201). Height 1.02 m, width 1.36 m. The Metropolitan Museum of Art (40.170.176)

7

Pattern traced from the top border on the dado in room W20 in Tepe Madraseh (see Figures 1.200, 1.212). Height of border when complete about 20 cm. Facsimile painting by Charles K. Wilkinson





8

Pattern traced from painting found on a wall at a low level in the South Horn. Height 19.5 cm, width 40.7 cm. Original drawing by Charles K. Wilkinson, color tracing by William Schenck

9

Pattern traced from painting found on a wall in the South Horn. Height 18.5 cm, width 39 cm. Original drawing by Charles K. Wilkinson, color tracing by William Schenck



10

Fragment of painted plaster from a well in Sabz Pushan, 5C, showing a woman's head. Height 26 cm, width 24.1 cm. The Metropolitan Museum of Art (38.40.248). Facsimile painting by Lindsley F. Hall



11

(below left) Fragment of painted plaster from a well in Sabz Pushan, 5C, showing a woman's head (see Figure 3.52). Bottom edge beveled on the back. Height 11 cm, width 17 cm. The Metropolitan Museum of Art (38.40.270)

12

(below right) Fragment of painted plaster from a well in Sabz Pushan, 5C, showing the face of a jinn (see Figure 3.56). Height 12 cm, width 10.5 cm. The Metropolitan Museum of Art (38.40.267)



13

Polychrome plaster mukarnas from a cellar (8C) in Sabz Pushan (see Figures 3.61, 3.64). Restored. Top: height 29 cm, width 15.5 cm; bottom: height 36 cm, width 29 cm. The Metropolitan Museum of Art (38.40.251, 249)



14

Polychrome plaster mukarnas from a cellar (8C) in Sabz Pushan (see Figures 3.63, 3.65). Restored. Top: height 30 cm, width 20 cm; bottom: height 36 cm, width 28 cm. The Metropolitan Museum of Art (38.40.252, 250)





15

(opposite top) Dish of fruit, floral motif, and border traced from the fourth layer of painting on a multilayered block of plaster from the Qanat Tepe bathhouse (see Figure 4.23). Height 26.6 cm, width 59 cm. The Metropolitan Museum of Art (39N252). Original drawing by Charles K. Wilkinson, color tracing by William Schenck

16

(opposite bottom left) Part of a depiction of a building traced from the second layer of painting (beneath a plain black layer) on a fragment of plaster from the Qanat Tepe bathhouse. The inscription in pseudo-Kufic suggests the phrase *la illah illa'llah* (there is no god but God). Height 15.6 cm, width 28 cm. Original drawing by Charles K. Wilkinson, color tracing by William Schenck

17

(opposite bottom right) Part of an Arabic inscription traced from a fragment of painted plaster from the Qanat Tepe bathhouse. The inscription repeats the phrase *al-mulk Allah* (sovereignty is God's). Height 27.5 cm, width 20.3 cm. Original drawing by Charles K. Wilkinson, color tracing by William Schenck

18

(top) Animal, probably a bear, traced from a fragment of painted plaster from the Qanat Tepe bathhouse (see Figure 4.33). Height 35.1 cm, width 23.3 cm. The Metropolitan Museum of Art (39N960). Original drawing by Charles K. Wilkinson, color tracing by William Schenck

19

(right) Hindquarters of a lion traced from a fragment of painted plaster from the Qanat Tepe bathhouse (see Figure 4.34). Height 22.2 cm, width 32.5 cm. Original drawing by Charles K. Wilkinson, color tracing by William Schenck





20

(*opposite top left*) Black duck traced from the third layer of painting on a block of plaster from the Qanat Tepe bathhouse (see Figure 4.35). Height 17.6 cm, width 11.2 cm. Original drawing by Charles K. Wilkinson, color tracing by William Schenck

21

(*opposite top right*) Bird, perhaps a partridge, traced from a fragment of painted plaster from the Qanat Tepe bathhouse (see Figure 4.36 top). Height 12.6 cm, width 15.4 cm. Original drawing by Charles K. Wilkinson, color tracing by William Schenck

22

(*opposite bottom*) Wing and part of the tail of a bird, perhaps a falcon, traced from a fragment of painted plaster from the Qanat Tepe bathhouse (see Figure 4.36 bottom). Height 17 cm, width 24 cm. Original drawing by Charles K. Wilkinson, color tracing by William Schenck

23

(*top*) Bird traced from the second layer of painting on a fragment of plaster from the South Horn. Height 9.5 cm, width 16.5 cm. Original drawing by Charles K. Wilkinson, color tracing by William Schenck



24

(*center*) Bird traced from a fragment of painted plaster found at a low level in the South Horn. Height 20 cm, width 40.2 cm. Original drawing by Charles K. Wilkinson, color tracing by William Schenck



25

(*right*) Bird traced from a fragment of painted plaster from the South Horn. Height 10.5 cm, width 19 cm. Original drawing by Charles K. Wilkinson, color tracing by William Schenck



26

Fragments of painted plaster (with the top three layers of painting removed) from the Qanat Tepe bathhouse, showing parts of the hunting scene reconstructed in Figure 4.37 (see also Figure 4.35, Plates 27, 28). Bottom left (showing the horse's muzzle): height 33 cm, width 25 cm. The Metropolitan Museum of Art (38.40.268, fragments 11, 13, 17, 19, 20, 42)



27

Fragments of painted plaster (with the top three layers of painting removed) from the Qanat Tepe bathhouse, showing a red animal that is probably part of the hunting scene reconstructed in Figure 4.37. Height 28 cm, width 40 cm. The Metropolitan Museum of Art (38.40.268, fragments 38a, b, d)





28

Face of a man, probably the hunter in the scene reconstructed in Figure 4.37, traced from fragments of painted plaster from the Qanat Tepe bathhouse. Height 33 cm, width 34 cm. Original drawing by Charles K. Wilkinson, color tracing by William Schenck

29



29

Faces of the male figures in the scene reconstructed in Figure 4.38, traced from fragments of painted plaster from the Qanat Tepe bathhouse. Height 32.5 cm, width 30.2 cm. Original drawing by Charles K. Wilkinson, color tracing by William Schenck

30

Man's head traced from a fragment of painted plaster from the Qanat Tepe bathhouse (see Figure 4.39, Plate 31). Height 11.5 cm, width 25.2 cm. Original drawing by Charles K. Wilkinson, color tracing by William Schenck



31

Man's head traced from the layer of painting beneath that shown in Plate 30. Height 13 cm, width 26.5 cm. Original drawing by Charles K. Wilkinson, color tracing by William Schenck

32

Man's head traced from a fragment of painted plaster from the Qanat Tepe bathhouse (see Figure 4.40). Height 15.3 cm, width 16.2 cm. Original drawing by Charles K. Wilkinson, color tracing by William Schenck



33

Woman's head traced from a fragment of painted plaster from the Qanat Tepe bathhouse (see Figure 4.41). Height 6.6 cm, width 12.7 cm. Original drawing by Charles K. Wilkinson, color tracing by William Schenck



# Introduction



Expedition storerooms, workroom, and bedrooms at Nishapur, 1947

FIVE DECADES AGO the ancient city of Nishapur in the province of Khurasan, in northeastern Iran, was excavated by the Iranian Expedition of The Metropolitan Museum of Art. The site was chosen because many references to the city in Arabic and Persian literature indicated that Nishapur had been founded in the Sasanian period (224–651) and that it was for several centuries in the succeeding Islamic period a town of great importance, with flourishing arts and crafts. From such records the assumption was made that a controlled investigation of the site would produce material of importance and add to our knowledge of the city, the people who lived there, and their decorative arts. Prior to 1935 antiquities from Nishapur had been acquired only in a haphazard way: either by travelers and visitors to the town, including the writer Henry-René d'Allemagne, who was there in 1907 and illustrated some of his acquisitions in *Du Khorassan au pays des Backhtiaris: Trois mois de voyage en Perse* (2, p. 119), or from the antiquities market, which received objects produced by minor commercial excavations. An example from the latter source is a bowl in the Metropolitan Museum acquired in 1915 (15.85.1) labeled as "said to have come from Nishapur." Antiquities from Nishapur also reached the market indirectly as a result of the local farmers' normal practice of digging away at the various mounds that dot the site to obtain their substance, the detritus of unbaked, sun-dried bricks, to scatter on their fields as fertilizer. The beneficial effect was probably due to the ammonia salts from the latrines. This procedure, undoubtedly of long standing, was reported in 1897 (Yate, *Khurasan and Sistan*, p. 410), and it has never abated.

In 1935, after I had made a preliminary investigation at the site, the Museum's expedition conducted some test digs at selected points in the vast ruin fields of the ancient city. The tests confirmed the desirability of a sustained investigation, and a recommendation to this effect was made to the Museum's trustees by Maurice S. Dimand, the curator of Near Eastern art. Approved by the trustees, the project was financed from the Rogers Fund, and excavations were carried out under a concession granted the Museum by the Iranian government (Council of Ministers) on the recommendation of the Ministry of Education of Iran. Work began in 1935 and continued until 1947, with the active digging coming to an end in 1940, when the state of affairs caused by the outbreak of World War II made suspension advisable. A short season in 1947 was conducted to tidy up and to surrender the concession.

After the work began, attention was concentrated on a few rewarding sites from which large quantities of Islamic materials were obtained. The finds were chiefly pottery, most of it ranging in date from the ninth to the beginning of the thirteenth century. Half of the material, in accordance with the Iranian antiquities law of 1930, was turned over to the Muzé Iran Bastan in Teheran (also referred to in this volume as the Teheran museum); the rest went to the Metropolitan. From André Godard, director general of the Iranian Antiquities Service, from Muhammad Mostafavi, his successor, and from other members of the service, nothing but kindness and help was received. The divisions of the excavated material between the two parties were conducted under conditions ensuring the utmost fairness, with final exchanges being effected so that each museum should have an equal and truly representative collection.

The excavations were conducted by Joseph M. Upton, Walter Hauser, and me, the same team that had constituted the Metropolitan's original Iranian Expedition and had worked at Qasr-i Abu Nasr, near Shiraz, from 1932 to 1935 (see Whitcomb, *Before the Roses*). Upton, the Museum's assistant curator of Near Eastern art, and Hauser, who was transferred from the Egyptian Expedition, of which he had been a member since 1919, had represented the Metropolitan Museum in a combined excavation with the German expedition under Ernst Kühnel at Ctesiphon in 1931-32. I had also served on the Egyptian Expedition, starting in 1920. Lindsley F. Hall, of the Metropolitan's Egyptian Department, assisted for part of one season at Nishapur, making some drawings. Hauser and I conducted the final season in 1947. One or two pressing problems were solved in this season; a few kilns were cleared, the storerooms were emptied, and the concession was surrendered.

In addition to yielding a great quantity of earthenware, both glazed and unglazed, the excavations produced much glass, some metalwork, many coins, and some remains of wall decoration in the form of ornamental bricks (a few of which were glazed), carved and painted plaster, and paintings in black or polychrome on white plaster. The pottery finds were published by the Metropolitan Museum in 1973 in a book by me, *Nishapur: Pottery of the Early Islamic Period*. James W. Allan presented the metalwork in *Nishapur: Metalwork of the Early Islamic Period*, published by the Museum in 1982, and the glassware recovered from Nishapur will be treated in a forthcoming book by Jens Kröger of the Museum für Islamische Kunst,

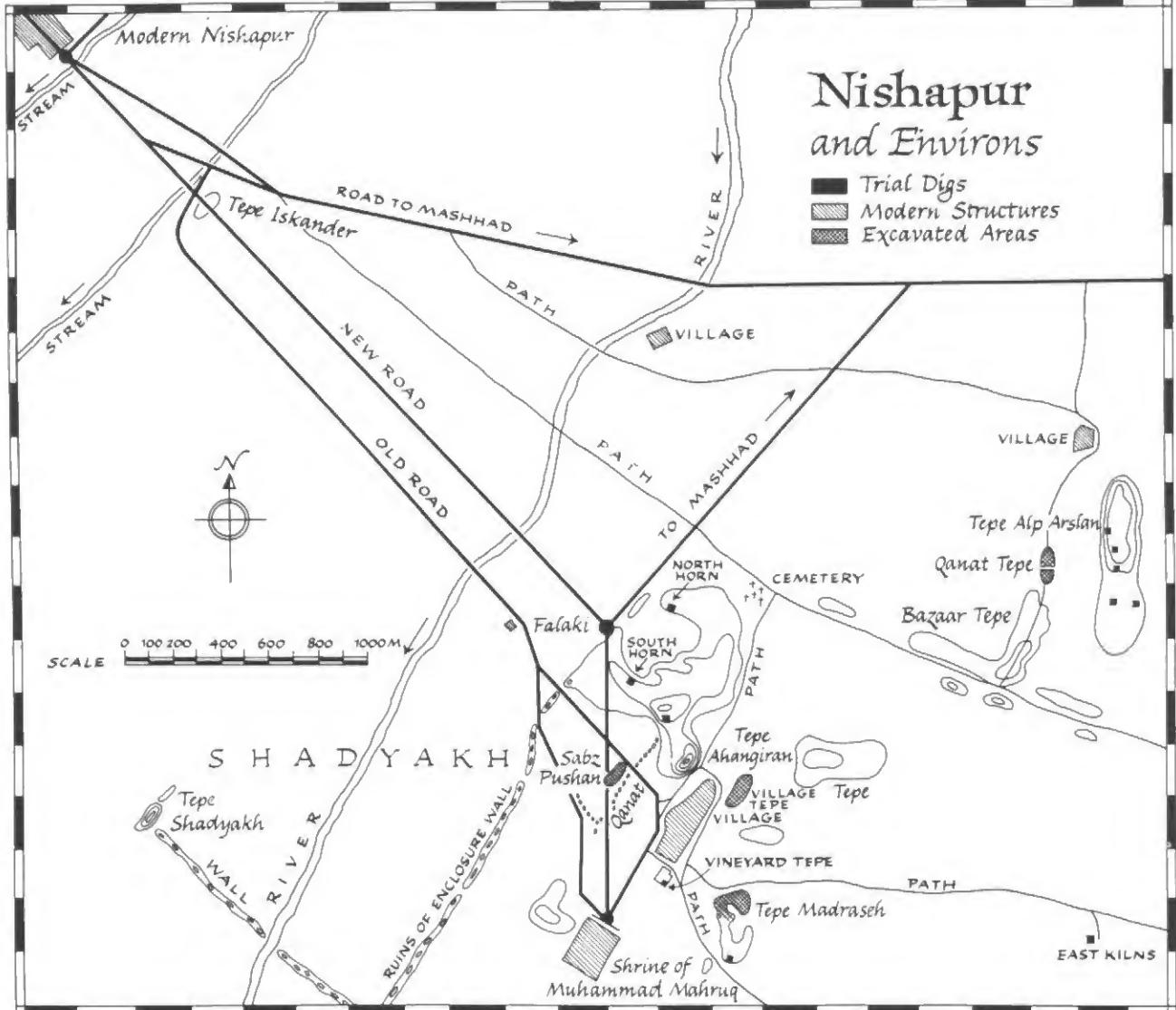


Expedition workroom at Nishapur

Berlin-Dahlem. The 1973 report on pottery, the initial volume on the results of the excavations, began with an introduction designed to give readers some indication of why the site was chosen, as well as a general idea of the history of Nishapur, which was for centuries a city of renown in the Islamic world and the home of several notable figures. As the subject of this volume is the buildings excavated at Nishapur and the brickwork, carved plaster, and wall paintings that adorned them, a brief history and description of the Nishapur of the past is even more essential than in a book concerned primarily with the ceramic vessels retrieved from the ruins. Much of that introduction is therefore reprinted here, with some omissions and additions.

## Nishapur and Environs

Trial Digs  
 Modern Structures  
 Excavated Areas



## HISTORY OF NISHAPUR

Present-day Nishapur is a town, with a railroad station, that serves as the marketing center of a large and productive area. The oldest part of the town was built in the fifteenth century after the devastating earthquake of 1405. In the town stands a congregational mosque erected in 1493–94. The town was walled until the third decade of the present century, when a gateway (see ill. opposite p. 245 in Jackson, *Constantinople to the Home of Omar Khayyam*) and some remaining stretches of wall were demolished on the order of Shah Riza Pahlavi, who wanted no walled towns to exist in his country. In the 1930s Nishapur had a bazaar more than a kilometer in length, with dyers and felt makers, fabric printers, and a modest number of metalworkers. Potters made both glazed and unglazed pottery, but only in the commonest sort of ware, such as water jars, could their productions bear comparisons with the pottery of their early predecessors. None of the modern production was being exported farther than to the neighboring villages—a far cry from the flourishing trade described by a writer of the tenth century, who tells of each hostelry in the Nishapur bazaar “being as large as a bazar in other cities. It produces various kinds of fine linens, cotton goods, and raw silk, all of which (because of their excellence and abundance) are exported to other lands of Islam, and even of Christendom; for kings themselves and nobles value them as wearing apparel” (Ibn Hauqal [978], based on Istakhri [951], quoted in *ibid.*, p. 253). As a mercantile center Nishapur has indeed diminished, some of its former functions having passed on to Mashhad, and it is no longer, as it was in early Islamic times, a seat of military and political authority. This change undoubtedly resulted from the action of the Shi‘ite Safavid kings who, in the sixteenth century, for political and economic ends, stimulated religious interest in the shrine of the eighth Imam, Ali al-Rida (known locally as the Imam Riza), in Mashhad. This diversion of pilgrims from the Shi‘ite shrines in Iraq to the one in Mashhad was encouraged right on into the present century, causing Mashhad to become wealthy and important to the detriment of Nishapur. Nishapur can boast only the shrine of a martyr related to the Imam, Muhammad Mahruq, who reposes today beneath a much restored tile-covered dome built in the seventeenth century.

Nishapur is situated in a fertile plain, part of the great plateau of central Iran. The plain is rimmed to the north by high mountains, of which the tallest peak, Mount Binalud, rises more than 2 kilometers above the plain, or more than 3 kilometers above sea level. The mountains separate the Nishapur plain from a plain to the east in which Mashhad and the erstwhile

city of Tus are situated, while to the west-northwest the plain of Gurgan extends to the southeast shore of the Caspian Sea. South of Nishapur the plain continues to be fertile for a few kilometers and then, for lack of water, fades into desert. The present town and the nearby land are watered to a small extent by rainfall but mostly from the mountains, atop which snow remains for most of the summer. The mountain water is carried in streams and underground aqueducts, called qanats, that start at the foothills. Qanats have long existed here, giving a disgruntled Arab traveler the opportunity to say, according to a writer of the eleventh century, that Nishapur would have been a most attractive town were the water above the ground and the people beneath it (Nasir-i Khusrau, *Sefer Nameh*, appendix 11, p. 278).

The extensive plain of Nishapur, famous for its fertility and pleasant climate, is highly suitable for a settlement, and there has been a populous center here from prehistoric times. Furthermore, this strip of rich agricultural land, bounded by mountains to the north and desert to the south, has long served as a corridor for peoples, armies, merchants, and travelers of all kinds passing between Asia Minor and Mesopotamia to the west and Sogd, Transoxiana, India, and China to the east. It was not the only such route, for there was another to the north of the Nishapur Mountains, but history makes it clear that the route past Nishapur was of the utmost importance. In the thirteenth century Yaqut, in his famous geographical dictionary, called Nishapur "the gateway to the east" (Barbier de Meynard, *Dictionnaire géographique*, p. 580).

Although there are historical references to more ancient settlements in this plain, no towns can be identified by name before the Sasanian period. Nishapur's very name says that it was founded by Shapur I (r. 241–72) or Shapur II (r. 309–79). (The origin of the city is well discussed in Jackson, *Constantinople to the Home of Omar Khayyam*, pp. 248–50, and further helpful observations will be found in Frye, *Histories of Nishapur*, p. 8.) In the Sasanian and early Islamic periods the city was also known as Aparshahr or Abarshahr and was the capital of a district so named. Richard N. Frye has confirmed that Sasanian seal impressions as well as coins of these periods bear this name (Frye, "Sasanian Clay Sealings," p. 131, pl. XXX, no. 32). From Syriac sources it is known that Nishapur was the seat of a Nestorian diocese in 430 (see Jackson, *Constantinople to the Home of Omar Khayyam*, p. 250, n. 4, for other references).

No real trace has yet been found of Sasanian Nishapur. Various writers have suggested that it lies in the ruin fields to the southeast of the present town. According to Lord Curzon (*Persia*, p. 262), the Sasanian remains are traceable around the tomb of Muhammad Mahruq, but in this he was probably mistaken. In 1908 Major Percy M. Sykes, the British consul in Mashhad,

a man much interested in Nishapur, concluded that the Sasanian city would be found in Janatabad, a village some 39 kilometers to the southeast (Sykes, "Sixth Journey in Persia," pp. 152-56). Although it is obvious that Nishapur, like some other ancient cities in western Asia, has not always been in one fixed location, in contrast to others that were rebuilt more than once on their ruins, the site of Janatabad does seem rather a long distance away. The Museum's excavations, with their negative evidence, strongly suggest that the Sasanian city existed outside any area so far examined, including Tepe Alp Arslan, the highest of the mounds in the ruin field, and the apron-like mound adjoining it. In his thesis "The Topography and Topographic History of Nishapur," Richard W. Bulliet maintains that Tepe Alp Arslan was the Sasanian fortress and the apron the walled Sasanian city; both, he says, would be discovered if one dug deep enough. Though it is of course possible that some Sasanian evidence might be produced by large-scale digging there, I regard it as unlikely for two reasons. First, the Museum's test digs in those two areas, admittedly only sondages, produced almost nothing that was positively Sasanian; furthermore, in the considered opinion of the expedition the apron was not inhabited before the eighth century at the very earliest. The second reason is that an enormous amount of digging has gone on at Tepe Alp Arslan for at least a hundred years, not from the top down but from the level in, and even so, no Sasanian antiquities have been discovered, except conceivably a stray coin or two. The Sasanian coins Yate (*Khurasan and Sistan*, p. 412) says were brought to him prove little since such coins were ordinarily carried from place to place. It is surely significant that during the Metropolitan's excavations over a period of five years only seven pre-Islamic coins were discovered, one Parthian and six Sasanian. Three of the Sasanian coins and the Parthian coin came from Sabz Pushan, a site that was thoroughly dug and is definitely post-Sasanian, and the other three came from a mound close to Tepe Alp Arslan, the Qanat Tepe, which is also post-Sasanian. Only one of the Sasanian coins was found at a low level; the finding of the others at higher levels confirms that they were kept long after they were minted. As for other Sasanian antiquities in the Museum's excavations, only a few pieces of pottery were discovered, and they were of a type that persisted into the ninth century at least. This point was determined earlier at Qasr-i Abu Nasr, where the Museum's expedition found a great quantity of Sasanian pottery together with some other Sasanian material.

Wherever the Sasanian city was, near or far from present-day Nishapur and its ruin fields, it fell, according to the Arab historians Tabari (830-923) and Baladhuri (d. 892), to an army of the third orthodox caliph, Othman (r. 644-56), led by 'Abdallah ibn 'Amir of Basra. The Arabs were then

driven out after an uprising in Khurasan and in Tukharistan, to the east of Balkh, in 656–57. Then, in 661, ‘Abdallah was reinstated by the first Umayyad caliph, Mu‘awiya, and commissioned to conquer Khurasan and Sistan, a province to the south. From this time on, although the city’s history was somewhat checkered by quarrels among the Arab leaders, the rulers of Nishapur were Muslims. A point to bear in mind is that Khurasan (the Land of the Rising Sun) was much larger during the period under study here than it is now, and Nishapur was but one of its capital cities. The others were Merv, Herat, and Balkh. Merv, some 300 kilometers northeast of Nishapur, is today in Turkmenistan; Herat and Balkh are in Afghanistan. All four are connoted in mentions of Khurasan in this book.

During the early period of Arab domination of Nishapur the conquering general, ‘Abdallah ibn ‘Amir, destroyed the Zoroastrian fire temple and built a congregational mosque on its site, allowing the Zoroastrians to build a new temple at some distance away (see original text of *Kitab anval-i Nishapur*, f. 66b, as reproduced in Frye, *Histories of Nishapur*). No physical remains of these buildings have been discovered, although it is likely that the Umayyad city was geographically identical with the Sasanian. The expedition’s failure to find any trace of the transitional city stands in contrast to the findings at Qasr-i Abu Nasr, a true transitional site of the same period. One of the features of the work there was the discovery of both true Sasanian coins and coins of the early Islamic period in Sasanian style with Arabic superscriptions. The practice of continuing the Sasanian style was sustained for some time and has been noted at other sites, such as Rayy (Miles, *Numismatic History of Rayy*, pp. 5–7). That not a single such coin was found at Nishapur must indicate that no buildings of the Sasanian or the early Umayyad period were uncovered.

One of the most important events in Arab history of the early Islamic era was the change from the Umayyad caliphate, with its seat in Syria, to the Abbasid caliphate established in Iraq. The rebellion against the Umayyads was begun in Khurasan by a Persian, Abu Muslim, who, under a black flag, the emblem of the insurgent Abbasids, entered Nishapur as conqueror in 748. By 750 the Umayyad caliphate was extinguished, and Abu al-‘Abbas al-Saffah (722–54) was seated as the first Abbasid caliph. With this change, the Iranians were in the ascendant for many years, their status vis-à-vis the Arabs vastly improved.

While he was governor of Khurasan Abu Muslim built in the eastern cities of Merv, Samarkand, and Nishapur, and in Nishapur a few coins have been found that bear witness to his power. Following his death—he was assassinated in 755 by the second Abbasid caliph, al-Mansur (r. 754–75)—seventy-five years passed during which there are no historical references to

construction in Nishapur. In this period there were several insurrections against the caliphate and many changes of governor. That Nishapur was an important place at this time is obvious from the number of times it is mentioned by contemporary writers and from the fact that two caliphs, before succeeding to that high office, were honorary governors there: al-Mahdi in 758 and al-Ma'mun in 796. The latter lived in Nishapur six years before he was installed at Baghdad. During the caliphate of his father, Harun al-Rashid (r. 786–809), we hear of his being given by Ali ibn Isa, governor of Khurasan from 796 to 806, a magnificent gift of Chinese porcelain. This is a matter of some interest in regard to the pottery of Nishapur in that the remains of Chinese porcelain and pottery were found in the Museum's excavations.

After playing its part in the rise to power of the Abbasid dynasty, Khurasan became, in the ninth century, a virtually autonomous province. The beginning of this development can be said to be Caliph al-Ma'mun's appointment, in 820, of a new governor for the eastern region. This ruler, Tahir ibn al-Husain, an able and successful general, nicknamed Ambidexter, had his capital at Merv. The dynasty that he established, and that flourished mostly within the bounds of Khurasan, is known as the Tahirid. As far as Nishapur is concerned, the most important of the Tahirids was 'Abdallah (r. 828–45), the second of the line, who chose Nishapur as his capital, deeming its climate better and its larger population generally more agreeable than those of Merv.

'Abdallah ibn Tahir built his palace and his officers' quarters in the most famous of the suburbs of Nishapur, Shadyakh, approximately 5 kilometers from the city proper. The name presents some difficulties: first because it is sometimes identified with Nishapur itself, and second because it has not always been ascribed to precisely the same place. In the twentieth century the name has been associated with an area enclosed by high ruined walls to the west of the shrine of Muhammad Mahruq and the tomb that is assumed to be that of Omar Khayyam; this is where Shadyakh is indicated on Sykes's map ("Sixth Journey in Persia," p. 153). There is reason, as will be seen later, to believe that the original Shadyakh lay to the east of this walled enclosure.

That Nishapur was vastly improved as a city under 'Abdallah ibn Tahir is suggested by the fact that he spent a million dirhems of his own fortune in building qanats (Bosworth, *Ghaznavids*, p. 157). The Tahirid dynasty, after about fifty years, was displaced by the Saffarid, which, like its predecessor, was more or less autonomous, operating sometimes with and sometimes without the caliph's approval. Military adventurers, the Saffarids came to power under Ya'qub ibn Layth al-Saffar (the Coppersmith), who expanded his sphere of influence from the province of Sistan, south of Khurasan, to

include Fars, of which Shiraz was the capital. By 872 he had taken Khurasan from the Tahirids. His brother and successor, 'Amr ibn Layth, ruled all these provinces and Kurdistan as well. Like the Tahirids, the Saffarids made Nishapur their capital. 'Amr ibn Layth did much to enhance the importance of Nishapur, among other things building an elaborately decorated Friday mosque, in which, supposedly, was a pulpit of the time of Abu Muslim. In his account of Nishapur Ibn Hauqal describes this building in detail. The mosque had eleven gates flanked by marble columns. Three arcades circled the court. The roof was supported by columns of burned brick, and both roof and walls were profusely ornamented, the main building with golden tiles (Le Strange, *Lands of the Eastern Caliphate*, p. xxvii). No trace of such a building has yet come to light. 'Amr ibn Layth also rebuilt the government palace of 'Abdallah ibn Tahir.

Contemporary with the Tahirid and Saffarid rulers in Khurasan was a dynasty in Transoxiana, that of the Samanids. As were the Tahirids, the Samanids were placed in power by Caliph al-Ma'mun. Of Persian origin, from Balkh, they began their rule in Samarkand in 819, later moving their capital to Bukhara. They owed nominal fealty to the caliph, but, like the rulers in Khurasan, they exercised their independence. Early in the tenth century, with dramatic success, they greatly increased their domain, first of all by defeating the Saffarids and capturing Khurasan. Within a short time their domain extended from India to Iraq.

Although the Samanids' capital remained Bukhara, there can be no doubt of Nishapur's increasing prosperity. This is evident from the accounts of contemporary writers, which in some respects are more precise and credible than those mentioning Sasanian Nishapur. Ibn Hauqal speaks of Nishapur in glowing terms, claiming that no other city in Khurasan was more healthy and populous. Both he and Istakhri give impressions of the town, its chief buildings, the Friday mosque that 'Amr ibn Layth had built, the governor's palace, and the bazaars and the crafts practiced within them, especially the weaving. The city was now an international trading center with merchants from Iraq and Egypt frequenting it. It had special bazaars for such cities as Gurgan, Rayy, and Khwarizm, and it served as an entrepôt for Fars, Sind, and Kirman (Bosworth, *Ghaznavids*, p. 150). The writers Istakhri (951) and Maqdisi (985) used Nishapur as a standard against which other cities were judged (Jackson, *Constantinople to the Home of Omar Khayyam*, p. 252).

The reign of the Samanids came to a close, as far as Nishapur was concerned, around the end of the tenth century. To the west they had to yield their gains to the Buyids, who, at the height of their power, dominated the caliphate, to the point of blinding one caliph (al-Mustakfi) and appoint-

ing his successor (al-Muti'). Furthermore, there was much warring among the Samanids and the Turkish generals and governors they had used for their purposes. These disputes led eventually to the supremacy of the Ghaznavids, who in their early days had served the Samanids. Mahmud of Ghazna (969–1030), a Turk who had commanded the army in Khurasan on behalf of the Samanids, with his headquarters in Nishapur, finally established himself in their stead, and in 999 he was invested with the authority of Caliph al-Qadir, whose name was restored to the noonday prayers on Fridays. In Shadyakh, Mas‘ud of Ghazna (r. 1030–40) built a palace with courts and pavilions and another for the use of his minister, Hasanak. Hasanak’s palace was later used for official visitors (Bosworth, *Ghaznavids*, p. 161).

From the Ghaznavids power passed to the Seljuqs in 1037. Of Turkish origin, the Seljuqs had come south, as other Turks had before them, into the northern parts of Khurasan. Recognized at first as Ghaznavid auxiliaries, they soon became stronger than their masters, and in 1038 they seized Nishapur, where Toghril Beg (ca. 990–1063) ascended Mas‘ud’s throne at Shadyakh and declared himself sultan, while his brother, Chaghri Beg, installed himself at Merv as the ruler of Khurasan. Toghril continued his advance westward and victoriously entered Baghdad itself in 1055, when he had his title confirmed by the caliph. Chaghri’s son, Alp Arslan (ca. 1030–72), was governor of Nishapur from 1059 to 1063. In 1061 he succeeded his father as ruler of Khurasan, and at Toghril’s death in 1063 he became the second Seljuq sultan. Leaving the administration of the empire to the vizier Nizam al-Mulk, Alp Arslan expanded its territories to include Georgia and Armenia, and in 1071 he established the Seljuq sultanate of Rum in Asia Minor. He was succeeded by his son Malik-Shah in 1072. Alp Arslan lived in Nishapur from time to time, and he is remembered there in the name of the highest of the mounds in the ruin field, Tepe Alp Arslan.

With the advent of the Seljuqs Nishapur became part of an enormous empire. The city flourished for a considerable period, and many buildings were erected. One of the early records of it at this time is by the poet Nasir-i Khusrau (1004–ca. 1072 or 1077), who visited there in 1046 and speaks of the building of a madraseh, or religious college (Nasir-i Khusrau, *Sefer Nameh*, p. 6).

In the twelfth century the city suffered major disasters: earthquakes in 1115 and 1145 and devastation by pillage and fire at the hands of the Ghuzz Turks in 1153. After these invaders had been driven off by al-Mu’ayyad, one of the mamluks of the Seljuq sultan Sanjar, the inhabitants were settled in Shadyakh, and Shadyakh now became the town of Nishapur—at least this is the account of Yaqut, who, however, did not visit Nishapur (Barbier de Meynard, *Dictionnaire géographique*, pp. 578–82).

Al-Mu'ayyad was in turn slain by the Khwarizm-Shah Tekish (r. 1172–99), who established himself in Nishapur in 1180. A number of coins have survived as evidence of his power there. After conquering Khurasan, Tekish extended his domination to Bukhara and Samarkand in Transoxiana.

Despite these reversals of fortune, in 1216 Yaqut considered Nishapur the richest, most flourishing, and most populous city on earth (*ibid.*, p. 580). Five years afterward came the devastating conquest by the Mongols under the leadership of Toluy, the son of Chingis Khan. All writers agree that Nishapur and its inhabitants were treated without mercy and that Shadyakh was completely destroyed. Hamdallah Mustawfi of Qazvin, writing in 1340, related how in 1232, eleven years after the Mongol devastation, "Shadyakh" was laid in ruins by an earthquake, following which a new city was built in another part of the plain (Le Strange, *Geographical Part of the Nuzhat al-Qulub*, p. 147).

But there is no point in pursuing further this account of disasters and rebuildings, for, with the Mongol period, we are at the close of the history that is covered in the present study.

## DESCRIPTION OF THE EXCAVATIONS

The excavations were made at a number of places, in some only briefly and on a small scale, in others on a larger scale, in an intensive way, for more than one season. It would have been gratifying if we could have associated any of the buildings uncovered with the names mentioned by the early historians and travelers, some of whom described the contemporary scene while others incorporated descriptions written in the past. However, a close association between named buildings and excavated structures cannot be made, and with one exception it has been felt better not to harden supposition into suggestion. Concerning the various sites excavated, the expedition was seriously hampered by the proximity, and in some instances, invasion, of cultivated areas. Under the law, cultivators could claim damages or the physical restitution of the site.

For simple practicality it was necessary to name the sites. Local names, if such existed, were adopted. Some of these have historical connotations—Tepe Iskandar, Tepe Alp Arslan, Shadyakh—but even so are misleading, as even a surface examination, aided by the breaches made by peasants, indicated. (Of these three sites only Tepe Alp Arslan was investigated.) Tepe Iskandar, for example, about a kilometer and a half east of the present town, would seem to be the site of a fourteenth-century building. And the area now

known as Shadyakh is probably not the original site of the suburb. The name of Tepe Alp Arslan, which has been in use since at least 1897, is plausible in that the site was inhabited in Seljuq times, as the name suggests. Other local names were descriptive, such as Tepe Sabz Pushan (Green-covered Mound), although it was not very green. Tepe Madraseh suggests that the mound was once the site of a religious college, and indeed Nishapur was famous for such establishments. The excavation at Tepe Madraseh did not confirm the presence of a madraseh, though part of the site was definitely used for religious purposes, and graves were discovered in the vicinity. When places were excavated that had no local name, the expedition gave them a name, usually derived from location: Village Tepe, Vineyard Tepe, Falaki, and Qanat Tepe. North Horn and South Horn were named from the shape of a large mound of which these sites were the extremities. One excavation, the Bazaar Tepe, was named after what was thought to be the site's original function, but it showed no signs of being a bazaar.

The buildings unearthed in Tepe Madraseh, the Vineyard Tepe, Tepe Sabz Pushan, and the Qanat Tepe—the mounds that we explored most thoroughly—are described in some detail in the following chapters. Brickwork, carved plaster decoration, and wall painting found at other places in the ruin field are brought into the discussion where relevant, as are parallels at other sites in the Near East. (For descriptions of the other areas excavated at Nishapur, some of them little more than sondages, see Wilkinson, *Nishapur: Pottery*, pp. xxxiv–xl.) The four mounds discussed at length in this volume had all been occupied on more than one level. Hauser incorporated all levels into a single plan in his maps of the Vineyard Tepe, Sabz Pushan, and the Qanat Tepe. Tepe Madraseh has a three-tiered plan, but even that does not reflect the complicated evidence of building and rebuilding, on at least four or five levels, that we discovered in some areas of the mound.

None of the Nishapur sites was functioning before the latter part of the eighth century at the earliest. Most of them were extinguished when the Mongols ravaged Nishapur and Shadyakh in 1221, though one or two areas continued to a twilight after that date. Although we dug to virgin soil in a number of places, no sign was found of any Sasanian building, and lack of foreknowledge that 1940 would be the last full season precluded the change in the modus operandi that would otherwise have been effected to obtain these basic and still missing data. The subsequent ravaging of the sites for commercial purposes has made any future attempt much more difficult, apart from the destruction of an incalculable amount of information concerning the pottery, the architecture, and the location of various areas of the ancient city known by name from the works of early writers. Some of this

digging was technically legitimate, an unfortunate clause in the antiquities law of 1930 permitting commercial excavation so long as some of the finds are turned over to the Muzé Iran Bastan. The intention was to give the Iranian Antiquities Service, at no cost to itself, knowledge of the ancient sites in Iran, but it is deplorable nonetheless that a site proved of the first importance should have been opened to ruthless exploitation. Nishapur deserved a better fate than death by looting.

# Chapter 1

## TEPE MADRASEH



1.1

Tepe Madraseh before it was excavated, looking southeast, July 1938. The field in the foreground is planted with cotton; the structure to the right is the guard's hut

TEPE MADRASEH was the most impressive part of ancient Nishapur excavated by the Metropolitan Museum. It was here that the forced cessation of the undertaking in 1940 seemed most frustrating and deplorable, for the buildings once standing on this site possessed architectural grandeur and had been of importance. These were obviously no ordinary residential quarters, but rather a complex planned and built on a scale more fitting a palace or governmental center. The walls were massive and solidly constructed, and the buildings had been embellished with decoration of various kinds, including carved and painted brickwork, glazed tiles, wall paintings on smooth white plaster, and elaborately carved plaster panels that had also been painted.

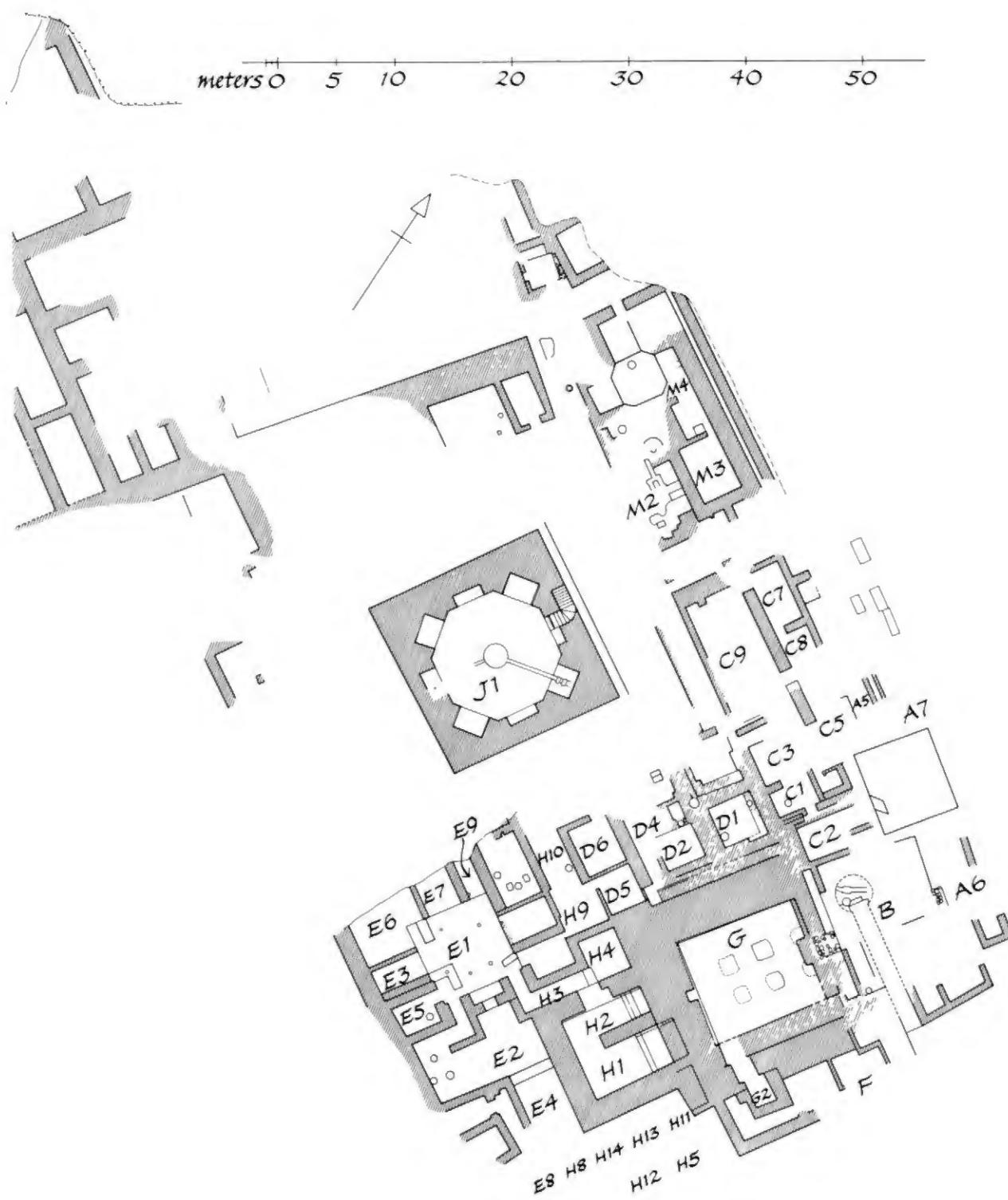
The members of the expedition were not of course aware of any of this when spade was first put to the large, irregularly shaped mound that rose like an atoll above the surrounding sea of cultivation (Figure 1.1). Our interest had been aroused by the size of the mound and by the name by which it had been known locally for over a century. Madrasehs, or religious colleges, have from both a functional and an architectural point of view held the attention of scholars for a very long time. In *The Patricians of Nishapur* (pp. 249–55), for instance, Richard Bulliet lists no fewer than twenty madrasehs that functioned from the tenth to the twelfth century. It was therefore with great anticipation that we began the excavations in the 1930s. Though we did not find exactly what we had expected, we were not disappointed, and I shall describe as accurately as possible what the digging actually revealed. The destruction of the mound after World War II, first by

# Tepe Madraseh

HIGH LEVEL

1:500

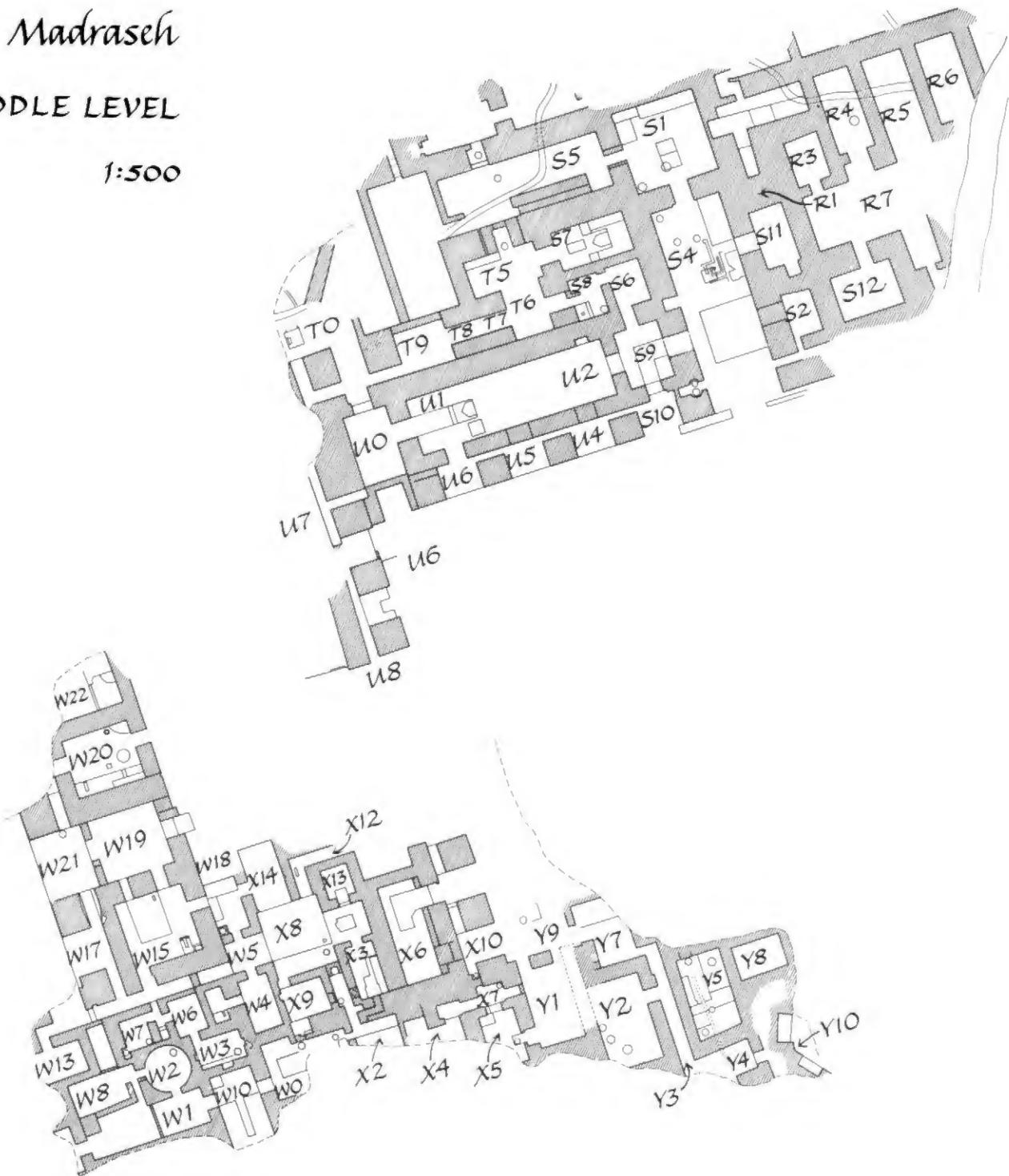




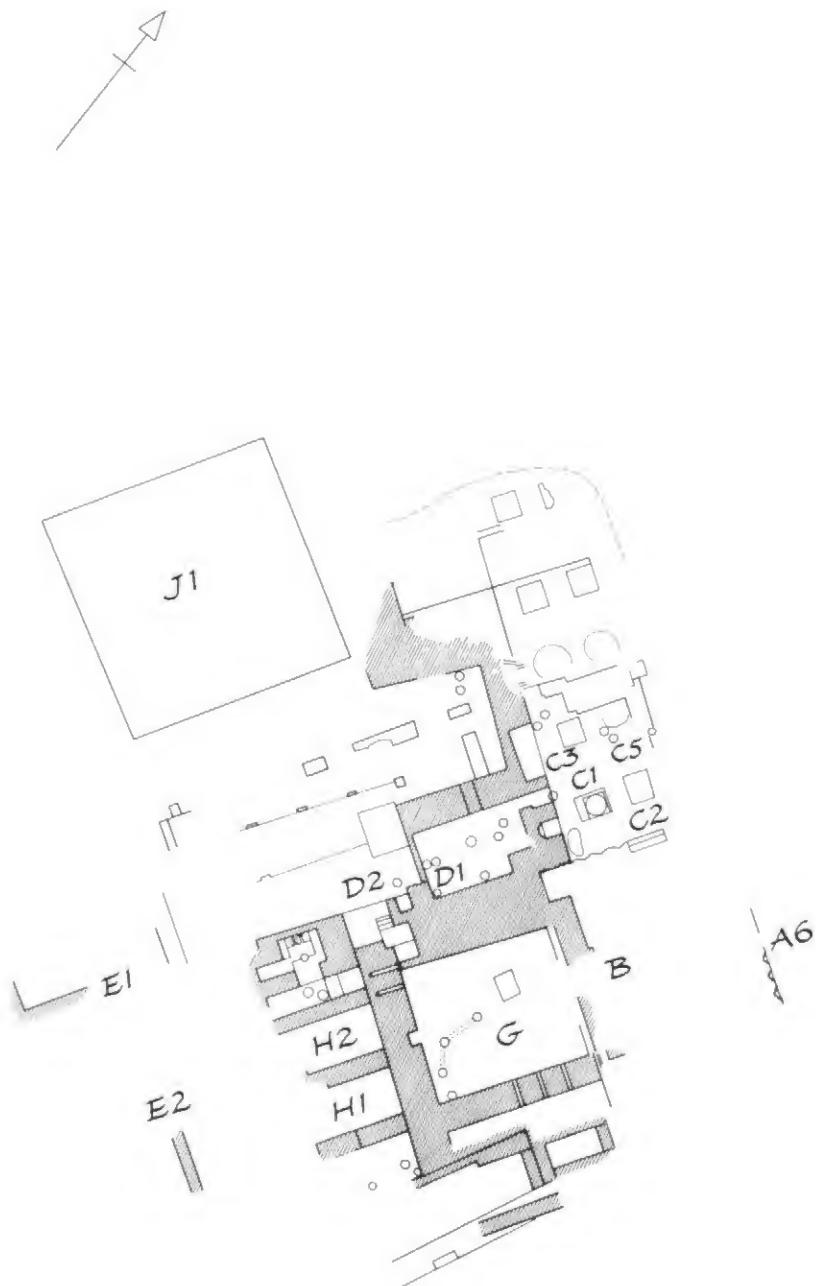
# Tepe Madraseh

## MIDDLE LEVEL

1:500



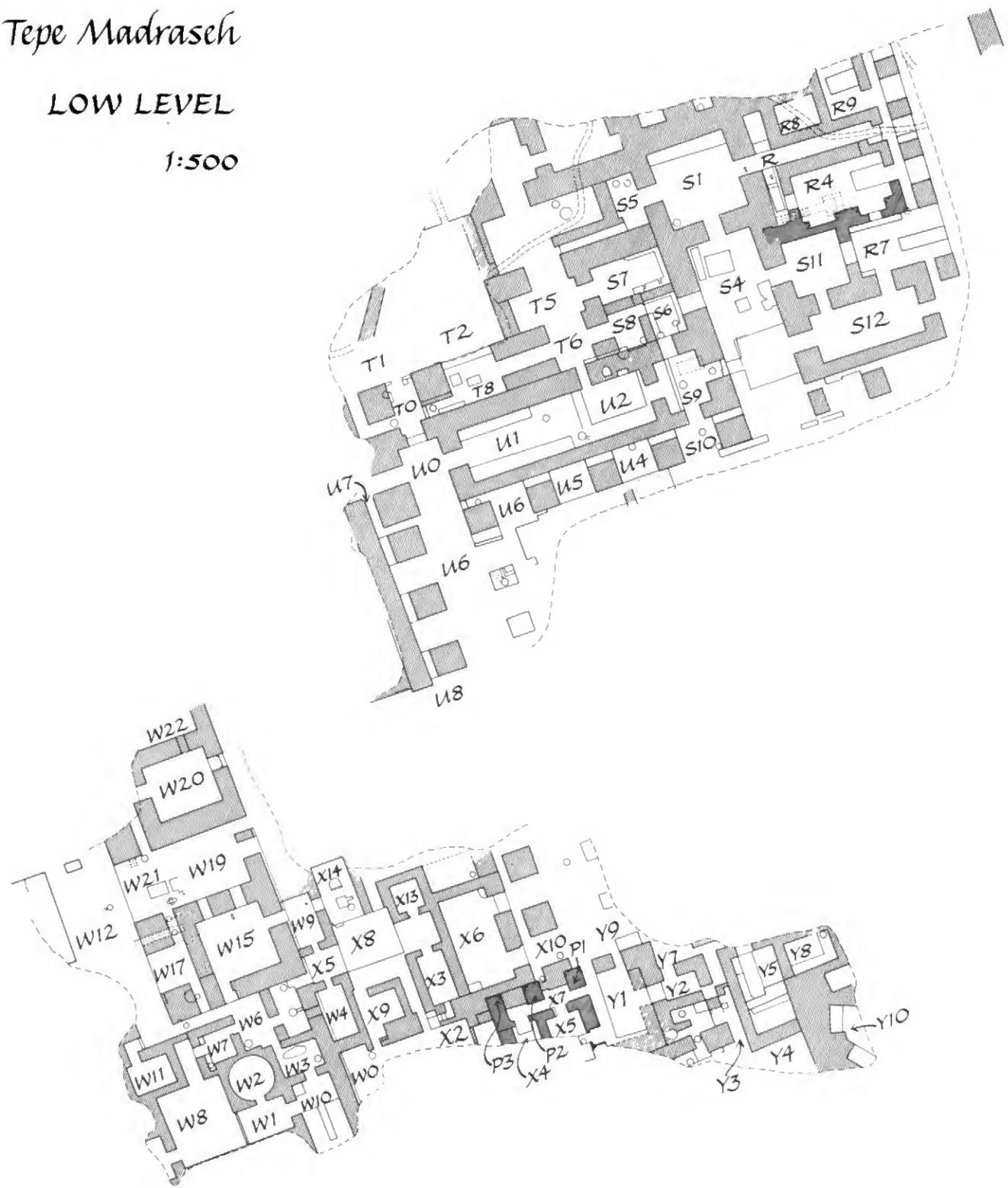
meters 0 5 10 20 30 40 50

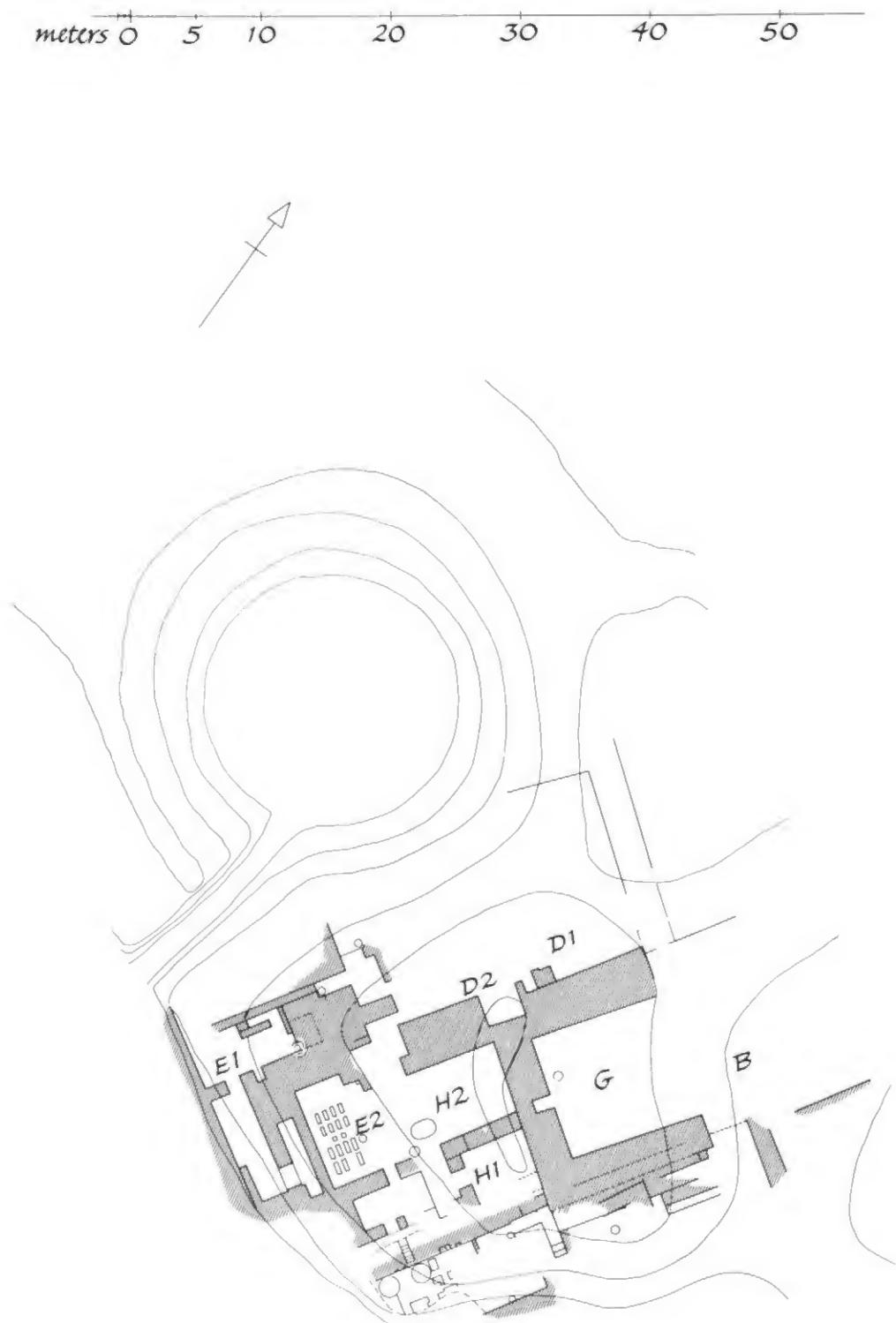


# Tepe Madraseh

## LOW LEVEL

1:500







## 1.2

Northwest side of Tepe Madraseh, which had not yet been excavated when the expedition departed in September 1940. Note the runnel for water at the left

commercial digging and finally by the construction of a railroad through the site, has unfortunately put an end to any hopes for further information.

Tepe Madraseh lay about a half kilometer northeast of the domed shrine of Muhammad Mahruq and the adjacent burial place of Omar Khayyam (who died in about 1125), and nearly 2 kilometers southwest of Tepe Alp Arslan, the largest mound in the ruin field. Figure 1.2, showing the northwest part of Tepe Madraseh, which had not yet been excavated when the expedition had to leave in September 1940, gives a good idea of the mound's original appearance. Pieces of brick, potsherds, and camelthorn and other such plants protruded from the surface, which was pocked where looters had pulled out kiln-made bricks, and perhaps also antiquities. The mound's edges had been frayed over the years by the intrusive hoes of peasants seeking to cultivate yet more of the land and to use the soil, rich with the nutrients of past decay, as fertilizer on their impoverished fields. The hut built to house a guard and the work tools, to the right in Figure 1.2, gives some idea of scale. Near the tent on the left was a path (not shown in the photograph) that for practical purposes was developed into a narrow road. Several graves were unearthed near this path, and there were probably others beneath it. One of the fragmentary stone slabs we recovered belonged to the fifth century of the Hegira (1106-1202), as the final sin in the inscription made clear (Wilkinson, *Nishapur: Pottery*, p. xxxi, fig. 4).

More than 100 coins were retrieved from the excavations at Tepe Madraseh:

2nd half 8th century	42	2nd half 10th century	20
8th/9th century	23	11th century	3
1st half 9th century	9	Seljuq(?) (11th/12th century)	1
2nd half 9th century	6	Tekish (late 12th century)	9
1st half 10th century	6	Mongol (13th century)	4

This tabulation by Joseph M. Upton shows that no fewer than 80 of the coins were of the late eighth and the ninth century, and 26 were of the tenth, when the Samanids ruled Khurasan. Only 4 of the coins dated to the eleventh and early twelfth centuries, and but 1 of those was Seljuq. This was surprising, for both Toghril Beg, the first great Seljuq, and his nephew, Alp Arslan, were intimately concerned with Nishapur. Toghril Beg was minting coins in Nishapur in 1036, two years before the Seljuqs seized control of the city from the Ghaznavids (Bulliet, "Nishapur in the Eleventh Century," n. p. 78). Alp Arslan was governor of Nishapur from 1059 to 1063, when he was declared sultan.

The ruins of the buildings in the tepe stood around three sides of a roughly quadrilateral depression, about 40 by 60 meters, that opened directly into a cultivated field on its southeast side. This "square" had also been cultivated, with either cotton, poppies, or wheat, and like the surrounding fields it was irrigated with water brought in qanats, or underground aqueducts, from the foothills of the Nishapur Mountains to the north (see Figure 3.18). Water from the qanats has supplemented the rainfall on the Nishapur plain for more than a millennium. The underground conduits not only supply water for irrigation, but flow beneath the city and the villages on the plain to provide cool, fresh drinking water to the households (see Wilkinson, "Water, Ice, and Glass," for a discussion of the qanats' role in both ancient and modern-day Nishapur).

## 1.3

Tepe Madraseh looking north, March 1940. The prayer hall (G on the plans) is at the top right; the southwest complex (W-Y) stands in the foreground. The buildings surround a "square" of cultivated ground that could not be dug



As more and more of the ruins were cleared, the general layout shown in Figure 1.3, which was taken looking north toward the mountains, began to emerge. Either by accident or, more likely, by design, the entire complex was oriented so that one wall of almost every building faced southwest, toward Mecca. Just above the breach on the southeast side of the intrusive square of agriculture, to the right in the middle distance in Figure 1.3, was a group of ruins around the back and sides of what had been a large, vaulted prayer hall. The hall is labeled G on the plans, the areas and structures around it A through F and H. Although the plans show only three general levels of occupation in this area, the rooms and buildings seemed to have suffered destruction, reparation, alteration, and even complete rebuilding in such rapid succession that it was almost impossible to follow one "level" throughout and quite impossible to describe the structures without a much more elaborate set of plans.

In the prayer hall itself we found evidence of no fewer than six floor levels. A portion of the floor in the hall was dug to virgin earth, and the three coins found there, one of 775–76 and two of about 785, give a post quem date. The hall may have been used into the thirteenth century, even after it must have suffered considerable damage not only in the earthquakes of 1115 and 1145 but also perhaps at the hands of invaders. At a high level in the "vestibule" (G2) we discovered a large candlestick with a clear blue alkaline glaze over black underpainting (Figure 1.4). The candlestick is studded with rosettes that were cast separately, then affixed and painted black, and the background is decorated with short, curved black strokes that recall decoration in luster painting of the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries (Lane, *Early Islamic Pottery*, pl. 54C). It is not beyond probability that this candlestick was one of a pair flanking the mihrab that functioned at the highest, and therefore latest, level in the hall, although by then the destruction around the prayer hall had probably been progressing for some time. Also from G2 came fragments of glass bowls decorated with patterns in silver stain, which scholars had previously thought to have been introduced in the fourteenth century (Nishapur photographs 38N441–42, Metropolitan Museum of Art, and see Heaton, "Silver Stain").

Forming right angles around the west and south corners of the field and extending along its northwest and southwest sides (to the left and in the foreground in Figure 1.3) were two groups of buildings of a quite different character, containing courtyards, vaulted corridors, and large halls behind massive piers facing onto the square. On the plans the rooms in the complex on the northwest side and continuing around the west corner of the square are designated R through U; the excavated rooms in the complex on the southwest side and clustered around the south corner are labeled W, X, and



1.4

Candlestick found at a high level in the "vestibule" (G2) of the prayer hall in Tepe Madrash. Gritty white body, black underpainting, clear blue alkaline glaze, studded with separately cast rosette knobs. Height 19.5 cm, diameter 30 cm. The Metropolitan Museum of Art (39.40.107). See Wilkinson, *Nishapur: Pottery*, p. 266, no. 17

Y. What had undoubtedly been important parts of these complexes, going back to the time of earliest occupation of the site, lay buried under cultivated fields we could not excavate. That the open square of cultivation before the facades stood higher than the topmost floor level of the buildings was puzzling (see Figures 1.28, 1.41, 1.54). How this was achieved, and when, we could only speculate, as we were unable to explore the cultivated area. It may simply have happened in later centuries as soil was added to the field.

A coin of Harun al-Rashid (r. 786–809) found on the floor of the lowest level near a solid pier suggested that no building took place in these complexes at an earlier period. The areas around X7 and R4 showed signs that there had been a change in orientation when the buildings mapped on the low level plan were built, but from then on the changes seemed to have been matters only of filling in narrow, vaulted corridors, enclosing piers in solid walls, or blocking doorways and cutting new ones. Later, there was a strong tendency toward subdivision. Though no large hoards of coins were found at Tepe Madraseh, five dinars were discovered together in a well at the second level from the top in room S7. One of the coins was of al-Mahdi (780), one was of al-Muktadir (911), and three were of al-Mustakfi (944), which surely indicates that this level could not have been functioning before the middle of the tenth century. A logical hypothesis would be that the buildings were begun by 'Abdallah ibn Tahir (r. 828–45), reconstructed in a very impressive way toward the end of the ninth century, and altered substantially in the late Samanid period (late tenth century). The complexes probably underwent still more changes in the eleventh century under the Seljuqs, but after that ruin began to overtake the buildings, and as time went on what was still habitable was further and further subdivided into more meager living quarters.

To the northeast of the mound was another great sunken area, much deeper than the cultivated square within it (Figure 1.5). Examination showed that here too, in the mounds rising at the right and the far end in the rim of the depression, there were buildings, but no direct link could be found between them and the structures excavated in Tepe Madraseh. We first thought this enormous area might be a *maidan*, or public square, like those mentioned in the early accounts of Nishapur, but that it was open along all of one side made that doubtful. It is possible, however, that the great depression was created when earth was removed to make the huge mass of bricks that would have been needed to construct the buildings in Tepe Madraseh and those nearby. The view in Figure 1.5 bears some resemblance to one observed on the outskirts of Nishapur in 1938, when under orders from Shah Riza Pahlavi the old walls and gate to the city had been removed and bricks were being made for the new buildings under construction (Figure 1.6).



1.5

Large depression on the northeast side of Tepe Madraseh



1.6

Brickmaking in Nishapur, 1938.  
The depression below ground level resulted from the constant digging of clay

The bricks shown in the 1938 photograph are sun-dried and known as khisht. Bricks of the same type, but larger, were the principal material used in the buildings excavated at all of the sites in Nishapur, though kiln-dried bricks, or ajur, were also used on occasion—as footing for walls of khisht, as pavement, or for decorative purposes. The sun-dried bricks used at Tepe Madraseh varied a great deal in size, from as large as 42 by 42 by 10 centimeters to as small as about 23 by 23 by 6. There seemed to be no correlation between size and when the khisht was made. (For information on brickmaking in Iran see Wulff, *Crafts of Persia*, pp. 109-25.)

Tepe Madraseh was the only mound at Nishapur where we found khisht



1.7

Furrows left by the wooden beams that once reinforced the khisht wall on the southeast side of S11

that had been reinforced with wooden timbers, set either vertically or horizontally. The technique was evident only in the main construction at the middle level, before any minor changes had been made to the buildings. By the irony of fate it was the strengthening beams that rotted and the mud brick that survived (Figure 1.7, and see 1.14, 1.16). The furrows left by the rotted beams in the prayer hall are indicated on the middle level plan.

#### *Excavation of the Prayer Hall and Environs*

A small preliminary sondage made at the inside edge of the northeast side of the mound (near E2, behind the prayer hall) produced the upper part of a thick wall of khisht (see Figure 1.24). To the right of the bricked-in doorway we found the first indication of an affluent society: a magnificent bronze ewer (first published in 1938 by Hauser, Upton, and Wilkinson, “Iranian Expedition,” fig. 23, and since by Dimand, “Sasanian and Islamic Metal-work,” p. 206, fig. 20; Marshak, “Bronzovyy kuvshin,” figs. 8, 9; and Allan, *Nishapur: Metalwork*, p. 83, no. 100). Boris Marshak dates the ewer (now in the Metropolitan Museum, 38.40.240) to the eleventh century, which is reasonable.

The lower levels of room E2 and the area around it were cleared later. Excavation on a large scale was begun on the northern edge of the mound, just in from the pathway and across from the test dig. Nearby was the

1.8

Walter Hauser surveying from the top of the rear wall of the prayer hall, the highest point of the mound, August 1938



1.9

Double khisht wall in the west corner of the prayer hall, September 6, 1938. In the distance to the right is the Safavid dome of the shrine of Muhammad Mahruq



1.10

South corner of the prayer hall, top level, where no trace of a mihrab remained on the southwest side. The walls show signs of continual reconstruction



highest point on the mound, designated for surveying purposes as being at an elevation of 100 meters; all lower floors and levels were then calculated based on their distance below this point. This area had obviously been the scene of illicit digging, for the ground was littered with bricks (Figure 1.8).

The chosen high spot proved to be the top of what was left of the rear wall of a hall (G), some 11 meters long and 9 wide, that had originally been vaulted. The walls, no less than 4 meters thick, were constructed of large sun-dried bricks, usually 40 by 40 by 10 centimeters (Figure 1.9). The virgin soil on which they stood was at a level of 95.11 meters, or just under 5 meters below the highest point, but the tops of the walls had not survived and there was no way of knowing at what height the great vaulted roof had begun. As can be seen in Figures 1.10–1.15, the walls underwent many changes as time passed; they were added to, reinforced, and rebuilt to repair



1.11

The prayer hall cleared to the top level, looking west, August 13, 1938. The tray at the left holds fragments of painted and carved plaster

damage from local disasters, whether neglect, violence, or earthquakes. Above the virgin soil at the lowest level (95.11 m) in the prayer hall there were five floor levels. The topmost, at 97.71 meters, was of plaster, as were the next two down, at 97.4 and 97.24 meters. On the next level, 96.4, was a dirt floor; below that, at 95.75, the floor was also dirt. The second, third, and fifth levels from the top are mapped on the plans.

That the hall had indeed always been used as a place of worship was certain, for despite the many changes of level there had always been a mihrab marking the qibleh, or point toward which the worshiper faces, in the center of the rear, or southwest, wall, facing Mecca. Barely a trace remained of the mihrab on the topmost level, a pity for it might well have been decorated. In

the east corner on this level (Figure 1.11) we found a few pieces of carved and painted plaster. The carved and painted decoration found at Tepe Madraseh is described in detail in the appropriate sections below.

On the next level, some 31 centimeters below the topmost plaster floor, the mihrab was well enough preserved to provide measurements (Figure 1.12). The niche was rectangular in plan, like all the mihrabs we excavated at Nishapur, and not large, measuring 78 by 115 centimeters. Here, on the mihrab and on the walls skirting it, a little of the bottom of a carved plaster dado remained, the only decoration still in situ in the prayer hall. The entire upper part of the dado had been destroyed by the introduction of up to nine courses of baked brick (to the left in Figure 1.12) that served as footing for later construction, presumably in the period that produced the carved and painted plaster found in fragments on the floor on the topmost level. Also on the second level from the top, where the general floor area was white plaster, six column bases had been constructed, curiously, of baked bricks surmounting short balks of timber (Figures 1.13, 1.14). There was no indication whatsoever of the type of columns these bases had supported. They could have been plaster or, possibly, wood. The high vaulted roof would not have needed structural support, but wood columns connected by rafters from which lamps could be suspended would not have been incongruous.

Two layers of carved plaster remained in place on the wall flanking the mihrab, proof that in the period contemporary with the third level from the top, just 16 centimeters below the second, a dado had also adorned the hall's southwest wall. This was the only place in the tepe where we could establish



1.13

(opposite left) Second level of the prayer hall looking east, September 14, 1938. The six column bases were built of baked brick and timber; the pair on the left are joined by irregular brickwork. The hole on the right is a subsidence

1.14

(opposite right) Column base in the west corner of the prayer hall. Note the marks of the plaster floor levels on the walls

1.12

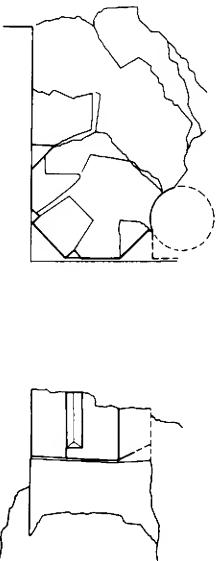
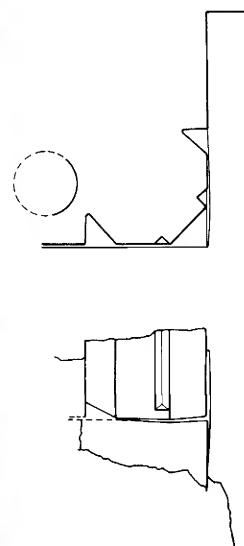
Southwest wall of the prayer hall cleared to the second level, September 13, 1938. On this level the bottom part of the mihrab and a strip of the carved plaster dado survived (see 1.123-1.125). The many courses of baked brick to the left of the niche served as footing for later construction



a true sequence in the decoration. Part of the mihrab on the fifth level down, at 95.75 meters, 64 centimeters above virgin soil, had also survived, but any decoration that might have existed in this earlier period had been destroyed when the first of the two layers of later carving was created. All that remained of the earlier work were two stumps of the columns that had once flanked the mihrab (Figure 1.15). As the drawing Lindsley Hall made at the site shows, the columns consisted of adaptations of part of what is basically an octagon. Hall indicated two circles 20 centimeters in diameter on his drawing, but he made no suggestion as to their purpose. The mihrab itself was 78 centimeters deep and 115 wide, like the one above it, and it was

1.15

Low level mihrab in the southwest wall of the prayer hall. Width of niche 115 cm, depth 78 cm. Plan and elevation, at 1:25, drawn by Lindsley F. Hall





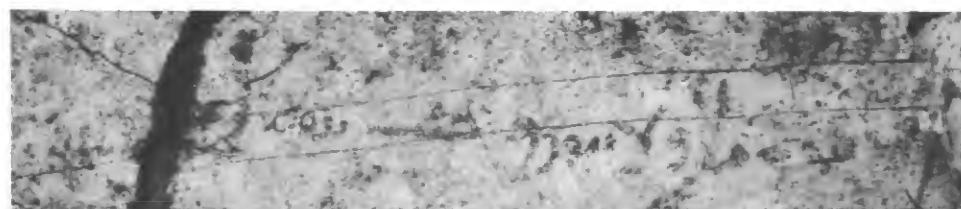
1.16

Doorway at a middle level on the northwest side of the prayer hall, leading to D2. The slot to the left of the door once held reinforcing timber



1.17

Plaster-covered steps in D2, middle level, at the entrance on the northwest side of the prayer hall. The staircase to the left gives access to a well. Note the brick footing for a later wall at least 1.75 m above this level



1.18

Arabic inscription painted in black on the southwest wall of the stairway at the entrance on the northwest side of the prayer hall

covered with hard white plaster that had been painted red above the spring of the columns.

Built on the same basic plan as are mosques still standing in Khurasan, the prayer hall was open at the front (the northeast side) to a courtyard. For centuries a great arched doorway probably provided the main and perhaps only access to the vaulted hall. At a late period a doorway was cut through in the southeast wall near the south corner. Some time before that (see middle level plan) there was an entrance on the northwest side near the west corner, up some plaster-covered steps and over a raised threshold from D2 (Figures 1.16, 1.17). On the wall of the stairway an Arabic inscription had been painted in black (Figure 1.18). James A. Bellamy, professor of Arabic literature at the University of Michigan, has been kind enough to read and translate the inscription: *[yaw]ma la yanfa'u malun wa-la banuna wa-kataba<t> yaduhu an taj[i'a] baliyatun* (the day when wealth and sons will not be useful, and His hand has written that tribulation shall come). Bellamy points out that the first phrase is from the Koran 26:88. He has not traced the second phrase, but notes that it appears not to be a hadith, as it is not found in the concordance of the Hadith. According to Bellamy, although the absence of a “t” at the end of *kataba* is an unusual mistake, as *yad* (hand) is always feminine, the entire inscription is rather carelessly written; note the lack of the final flourish of the ‘ayn in *yanfa'u*.

Adjacent to the entrance to G in D2 another stairway (on the left in Figure 1.17) led down to a well, presumably for use by the occupants of the nearby dwellings. The stairway was completely blocked at a later period.

An elaborate brickwork facade had once enclosed the courtyard (areas

## 1.19

(below left) Men extracting carved bricks from the collapsed ab-anbar in area B. The high, flat area is the top level of the prayer hall; the mound to the left is an excavation dump

## 1.20

(below right) Steps leading down into the ab-anbar in B





1.21

Spring of a vault in H1, behind the prayer hall. The meter rod rests on khisht filling used to buttress the rear (southwest) wall of the hall

A and B) in front of the prayer hall (see Figures 1.67–1.69, 1.71). Early in the excavations a subsidence occurred in area B (Figure 1.19), and in the course of clearing it we recovered a number of carved bricks, some with inscriptions, others of an ornamental nature. Further investigation revealed that the subsidence had been caused by the collapse of a domed underground chamber, or ab-anbar, 3.2 meters in diameter. A deep ab-anbar just outside the front entrance to a religious building is not extraordinary in Khurasan. The entrance to this chamber was near the east corner of the hall, where we found no evidence of a brick facade (Figure 1.20). One would have descended the long, straight flight of twenty-six steps built of kiln-dried brick to obtain water from a narrow brick channel fed by a qanat 2 meters below the surface. So great was the destruction in front of the hall that not enough of the ab-anbar survived to allow a credible reconstruction.

After only slight excavation of the courtyard we uncovered the square base of an octagonal minaret less than 10 meters from the north corner of the prayer hall (at the left in Figure 1.67, at the right in 1.69). When the minaret was built the north corner of the brickwork facade was destroyed, and later, when the steps next to it were added, even more of the original construction was obliterated. The area around the north corner of the hall, designated C1–2 on the plans, suffered many changes. On the middle level, below the rubble and flimsy walls of the later periods, we discovered more ornamental slotted brickwork and the remains of some circular brick columns that had been built on top of solidly constructed brick piers of an earlier stage (see Figure 1.73). In a khisht wall at the middle level we found a recessed mihrab. From this area also came several interesting fragments of carved plaster decoration.

The chambers abutting the back of the prayer hall went to great depth, and some of them had been filled with brick, doubtless to strengthen the hall's rear wall. One wall in H1 showed signs of vaulting in khisht (Figure 1.21). Note the slight projection at the springing of the arch, which is typical of pre-Islamic architecture (see, for example, the eighth-century arch illustrated in Ghirshman, "Fouilles de Châpour," pl. XI,2). At a low level in H4 a small piece of painting, a design of squares and rosettes, still clung to the wall, but we were unable to save it except as a drawing (see Plate 3).

To the west of H4 we discovered a large courtyard (E1) that had existed on several levels and had undergone a number of changes (Figures 1.22, 1.23). The doorway at the center in Figure 1.23 is the one shown blocked in Figure 1.24, a view of room E2 (where we had made our preliminary sondage) after it had been cleared to the lowermost level. We were never able to ascertain the purpose of the sixteen rectangular "benches" arranged in two groups of eight on this level of E2. The benchlike structures were built of

kiln-dried brick; each was one brick (24 cm) wide and 90 centimeters long. Against the southwest wall was a fireplace, also built of brick, the only part of the room that showed signs of fire. We first thought this room might have been a kitchen, but the brick platforms could also have been supports for a floor beneath which hot air was circulated, as in a bathhouse.

Area D, extending along the northwest wall of the prayer hall, had likewise seen much alteration and rebuilding. Figures 1.25, 1.26, and 1.27 give some indication of the sketchy remains of the construction on the upper level—narrow walls that contrast with the massive side wall of the prayer hall they adjoin. In the foreground in Figure 1.26 is a shallow aboveground pool, or hauz, less than a meter in diameter. A hauz serving either as ornamental embellishment or a more practical domestic function is still a characteristic of Iranian houses. The more functional pools are usually rectangular, and they are sometimes lined with bricks, as was the pool we discovered at a low level in area T0 on the western edge of Tepe Madraseh (see Figure 1.40).

1.22



1.22

Court (E1) behind the prayer hall, looking southeast, September 18, 1938, after the topmost rubble had been cleared

1.23

E1 looking southeast after further clearing, October 30, 1938. In the middle distance on the left one can see the levels of plaster flooring separated by brick footing. The doorway at the center is the one shown blocked in 1.24

1.24

E2 cleared to the lowest level, looking west, September 18, 1938



1.23

1.24

1.25

Area D, high level, looking west toward the domed shrine of Muhammad Mahrūq, September 26, 1938. The dark swath above the workmen's heads is the square of intrusive cultivation; the lighter areas beyond are the northwest and southwest sides of Tepe Madrāseh



1.26

Octagonal hauz constructed of baked brick on the upper level of D. The man squatting on the wall at the left is the owner of the Vineyard Tepe



Ornamental pools often have a less simple plan, a favorite shape being the octagon, as is often seen in Persian paintings. An eight-sided pool, actually the basin of a small fountain with a channel on one side to allow water to flow from it, appears in a miniature illustrating Nizami's *Khamsa* (Five poems) that was painted by Bihzad in Herat in 1494 (Gray, *Persian Painting*, p. 123). Like the one in the painting, the pool we found at Tepe Madrāseh



1.27

Areas C and D looking north, November 30, 1938. The massive wall at the lower right is the north-west side of the prayer hall

was octagonal and had a narrow channel leading out from one side. Circular apertures had been placed near the bottom on two other sides. Surrounding the pool were later structures abutting the northwest wall of the prayer hall and contiguous with the brick facade at the front (Figure 1.27). These rather poorly constructed additions had been built over a substantial room (D1) that was never cleared. As is evident from Hauser's plans of areas C and D, the buildings had been altered an incredible number of times. For what we hoped was the time being, we shifted our attention elsewhere.

A little before the close of the excavations in 1940 we discovered another, far more pretentious ab-anbar some 15 meters from the northwest wall of the prayer hall. The chamber (J1 on the top level plan) was built of kiln-fired bricks and had originally been domed. Its outer walls formed a square 16 meters on a side. Around the inside of the square an octagonal brick platform 60 centimeters high had been constructed to form, as it were, benches in alcoves. A qanat fed a circular pool just over 2 meters in diameter in the center of the floor. We resumed digging in this area when we returned to the ruin fields in 1947 to hand over the site to the Iranian Antiquities Service. It was then, on the northeast side of the chamber, the last side to be cleared, that we discovered the entrance, a staircase with a right-angle turn. There was no indication that this ab-anbar, oriented somewhat differently from the prayer hall, had had any but a secular function. It seemed to have been of fine construction, but the details of any decoration either inside or

out must unfortunately remain a matter for speculation because the compulsory cessation of the excavations precluded further investigation.

Excavation of the buildings around the prayer hall, which seemed to extend for some considerable distance, was never completed. Parts of the complex lay beneath cultivated fields we could not disturb, but between the impressive dome of the ab-anbar and the northwest edge of Tepe Madraseh and the road that skirted it was a row of rooms we were able to clear only enough to indicate them on the upper level plan (area M), and we had expected to resume the digging in areas C and D to attempt to understand more clearly the complicated building there. Although we were quite willing to stop the excavations temporarily in 1947, when an earth tremor occurred while we were working below ground in J1, that we were never able to continue exploring an area of such obvious importance is regrettable.

#### *Excavation of the Northwest and Southwest Complexes*

The north corner of Tepe Madraseh was never dug. Before the expedition ended, however, we had managed to clear, often to deep levels, large portions of the complexes across the intrusive field of agriculture from the prayer hall. It was soon possible to see that impressive architectural facades had fronted the northwest and southwest sides of the square (Figure 1.28, and see 1.53). Massive piers 2.5 meters wide and 3 meters apart faced the square. Between the piers and the walls behind them were passageways 60 to 80 centimeters wide. The piers had probably been connected to the buildings by vaulting and to each other by arches. The only connection between pier and wall to survive is shown in Figure 1.29, a view of the west corner, at U6. The facades were dramatically altered over the years: piers were embedded in solid masses of khisht, and some of the corridors behind and between them were partly filled in. But with all their surfaces covered in fine white plaster sparkling in the sun, the buildings facing the square must once have been a dazzling sight.

In the complexes behind the facades, in addition to the changes of floor level, old entryways had been blocked and new ones constructed, and rooms had been subdivided and their internal plans modified. Some of the rooms had been elaborately decorated with wall paintings, carved plaster dadoes, and molded stucco cornices and window frames, all of which are described in detail later in the chapter. Much of the decoration was buried under layers of fill in rooms whose functions had changed completely in later periods.

On the northwest side of the square of agriculture we excavated an important complex of buildings that had survived, with alterations, for at least a century. The series of photographs recording the clearing of U1-2, the



1.28

Tepe Madraseh looking northeast from U6, along the row of piers fronting the northwest side of the square of agriculture, February 22, 1940. The holes in the foreground were exploratory and should be ignored



1.29

U6 looking west, April 5, 1940, showing the sole surviving example of a connection between a pier and the wall behind it

1.30

U2 looking east, September 20, 1939. At this, the highest level, the floor was of smooth, even plaster. The prayer hall complex is at the upper right



1.31

U2 looking east, September 22, 1939, when the sunken entranceway on the southeast side had been revealed



1.32

U1-2 looking east, October 3, 1939. The partition wall in the foreground belongs to the higher level



two rooms behind the piers at the western end of the northwest facade, give some idea of the kinds of changes that took place, often within the same set of walls. The highest level of U<sub>2</sub>, where the plaster floor was a uniform level but for the recessed area in front of the doorway on the northeast side, is shown in Figure 1.30. In Figure 1.31, taken two days later, the floor looks very different, and a sunken entranceway on the southeast side has been revealed. At the level shown in Figure 1.32, U<sub>1</sub> and U<sub>2</sub> were one long hall; in Figures 1.33 and 1.34, where the last of the dividing wall has been cleared away, one can see the entrances at each end, on the southwest into a corridor, on the northeast into a square anteroom we labeled S9. By then the



1.33

U<sub>1</sub>–2 looking south from S9, October 13, 1939, when we had begun to clear the piers on the northwest facade and before we had excavated the southwest complex



1.34

U<sub>1</sub>–2 looking southwest, with S9 in the foreground and the partially cleared row of piers to the left, October 23, 1939

1.35

U1-2 looking east, November 23, 1939. We discovered a similar prow-shaped platform in S7 (see 1.38)



1.36

U1-2 looking north from the west corner of U1, December 7, 1939



1.37

U1-2, lowest level, looking southwest, March 1940. The marks of the two major higher floors show on the wall, and the remains of the partition wall are still visible. Note the long, low iwans built along the walls



piers facing the square had also been partially bared and the corridor behind them, as well as the wide entranceway from the square into S4, had been revealed. Figure 1.35 shows the hall cleared to the middle level, where it had been furnished with liwans, or raised seats along the walls, and a peculiar prow-shaped platform. Figure 1.36 is a view of U1-2 and the row of piers two weeks later. The original room, with its low liwans, can be seen in Figure 1.37, where the three major changes of level show clearly on the wall.

Many of the rooms in the Nishapur ruins had rectangular sunken areas near the doorway, often with a small hole to form a sinkaway to facilitate cleanliness. Liwans like those in U1-2, another sign of refinement in living



1.38

Prow-shaped platform on the middle level of S7, looking northeast, October 13, 1939

conditions, lined the walls in many rooms. The low platforms surely provided clean, convenient places to sit. The positions and heights of the liwans had often been changed with remarkable frequency, even in small rooms like S7, where the five gold dinars were retrieved from a well. At the middle level of S7 (Figure 1.38) we discovered a prow-shaped platform like the one on the middle level of U1-2.

Changes had been made in these rooms at each level of occupation. The only arched doorway found intact in the entire excavation of Nishapur, for instance, existed only at the lowermost level of room T6 (Figure 1.39), where the difference in floor levels was more than 2 meters. Not far away, in area T0 on the western edge of the excavated area, we uncovered a brick-lined hauz that at the top level had been buried in rubble (Figure 1.40).

At the middle and lower levels, one could walk from U1-2 into S9, the square anteroom, and then into S4, a great hall at least 15 meters long and 9



1.39

(above left) Doorway in the southeast wall on the lowest level of T6, the only arched entrance we found intact. The difference in floor levels here was over 2 m, and the old walls existed to that height. The high ground is the square of cultivation within the tepe

1.40

(above right) Brick-lined hauz in area T6. The earthenware hoops behind the pool formed a qanat of a much later date, made when the hauz had long been buried in rubble



wide that was open to the square along all of its southeast side (Figures 1.41, 1.42). A doorway on the northwest side of S4 led to a large square room designated S1. On the northeast S4 gave access to a group of rooms of which one (S11) had been decorated with wall paintings. Northeast of these rooms we discovered the start of another row of piers, but only two of them had been laid bare when the expedition came to an end.

On the middle level (at 95.85 m) S4 had been decorated with carved plaster dadoes; a fragment of the carving was found still adhering to the



1.41

S4 looking east from S1, November 1939. The high ground of the cultivated field blocks the wide entrance on the southeast side of S4



1.42

S4 looking south, December 8, 1939



1.43

S4 looking northwest into S1, February 13, 1940. The fragment of carved plaster in situ to the right of the doorway was contemporary with the mihrab in the southwest wall

right-hand wing of the northwest wall (Figure 1.43, and see 1.144). On the same level, the hall had been furnished with a mihrab in the southwest wall, to the right of the doorway into S9 shown in Figure 1.44. At the top level both the mihrab and the doorway were blocked with solid khisht; on the

1.44

Southwest wall of S4, middle level, April 5, 1940. The door to the left of the mihrab leads to S9. In the middle distance to the left is the mihrab in U6 (see 1.55)

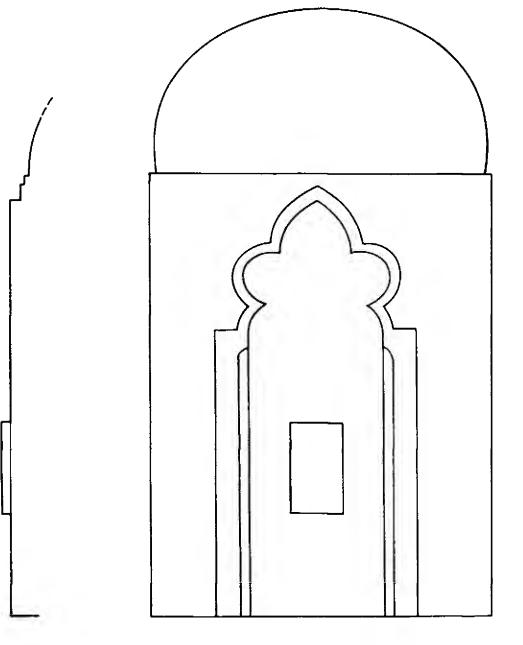


1.45

Mihrab in the southwest wall of S4. Elevation and profile of back wall drawn by Charles K. Wilkinson



lowest level the doorway existed but not the mihrab. The mihrab, shown in close-up in Figure 1.45, formed a deep rectangle. Mihrabs built on a rectangular rather than a semicircular plan were a distinctive feature of Islamic architecture by the ninth century in the Perso-Mesopotamian area, as is evidenced by those found in the Tarik Khana at Damghan (Creswell, *Early*



*Muslim Architecture* 2, p. 100), in the Great Mosque at Samarra (ibid., p. 258), and at Nayin (Flury, "Mosquée de Nayin," pls. 18, 20). We found no semicircular mihrabs in the Nishapur ruins.

The floor of the mihrab in S4 was raised slightly above the floor of the room. Its top was shaped into a half-dome, with no suggestion of a point at the top. As was common in pre-Islamic architecture, the half-dome sprang from a slight projection, in this case about 1.45 meters above the floor. A white plaster trefoil decorated the rear wall. Beneath the trefoil were depressions in which a small rectangular slab (20 x 17 cm) and two columns had once been inserted. It is more than likely that the missing parts were of a material more precious than plaster, possibly stone, and that they were stolen when the mihrab was bricked in. If the niche was not filled in until the eleventh century, a glazed ceramic plaque may have adorned the rectangular opening. In any case, that the decorative slab was lost was indeed unfortunate, for it very probably contained an inscription that would have been helpful in ascertaining its date.

Room S1, adjoining S4 to the northwest, had also been altered a number of times after it was built. At the lowermost level a long corridor led from S1 to the row of piers on the northeast side of the complex, which was never fully excavated. On either side of the corridor was a group of rooms labeled R. On the lowest level mapped on the plans room R4 had two alcoves with engaged columns. An architectural feature of a more unusual nature was found in R8, where one thin wall, obviously not part of the main construction, contained a number of small niches arranged in two rows (Figure 1.46). The niches could have been purely decorative, or they could have served some more practical purpose, perhaps as a place to keep lamps or



1.46

Inserted wall with niches on the low level of R8, looking east, April 1940. The sinkaway near the east corner suggests that the niches may have served some practical purpose



1.47

Top level of S1 looking south, August 26, 1939. At this level only the upper part of the shallow mihrab in the southwest wall near the west corner was visible



1.48

S1 looking west, September 2, 1939

trinkets. At the middle and top levels these architectural details no longer existed, and there was no access between S1 and the R complex.

The only other mihrab found in the northwest complex was in S1. This mihrab, set into the thick khisht wall that formed the southwest side of both S1 and S4, had existed throughout all periods of occupation at the site. As the photographs taken while we were clearing S1 show, the mihrab was visible through all the many changes the room underwent, though at the uppermost level, only its top could be seen (Figures 1.47-1.51). Though it too was surmounted by a trefoil, done in plaster, this recess was but a few

centimeters deep, much shallower than the other mihrabs found at Tepe Madraseh. (Shallow mihrabs were found at Sabz Pushan, where the buildings were on a much less massive scale, but none was as shallow as this niche.) That the mihrab was placed near the corner suggested that the room had had a secular function. In secular rooms or living quarters in early Islamic Nishapur the mihrab, if there was one, was always in a corner and never, as in a place of public worship like the prayer hall, in the center of the wall. The area immediately in front of the mihrab in S1 was at the same level



1.49

S1 looking west, September 4, 1939,  
when the steps down into the rectangular hauz had been exposed



1.50

S1 cleared to the lowest level, looking west, November 18, 1939



1.51

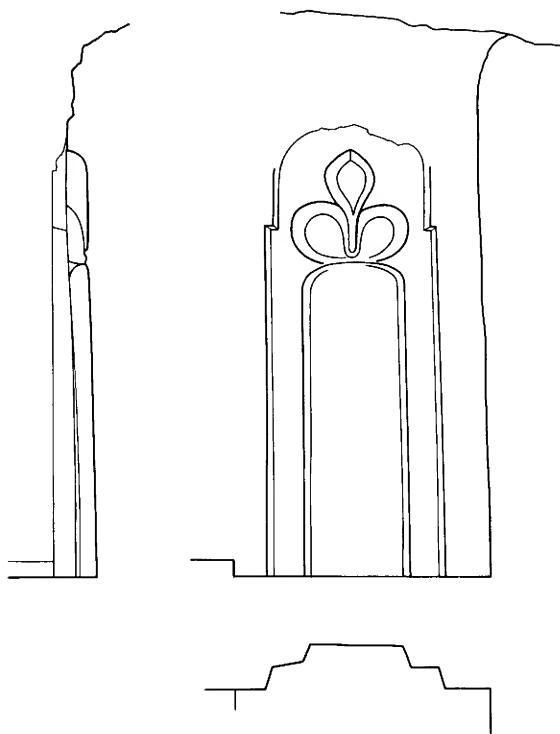
(right and opposite left) Mihrab in the southwest wall of S1, November 22, 1939. Plan and elevation and profile of back wall, at 1:25, drawn by Lindsley F. Hall

as the general floor area of the room, but immediately to the left was a raised platform, and in Figures 1.50 and 1.51 another platform can be seen extending along most of the wall to the right. Thus a small depression was created just in front of the niche to leave room for a small mat or rug in a spot set a little apart from the general activity in the large room.

Another definite hauz was discovered near the mihrab at a middle level in S1 (Figure 1.49). This rectangular pool, however, was more in the nature of a tank, and it was unusual in that it had three steps extending the full width of its narrow northwest side. The tank did not function at all at the upper levels, nor did it exist when the mihrab was fully exposed, that is, at the time the mihrab was constructed. We at first thought this might be an entrance to a zir-i-zamin, or underground room, but that proved not to be the case. Whether the mihrab served as a qibleh when the hauz was in use is also uncertain.

When an extraordinary group of molds was discovered on the lowest gatch floor in S1, embedded in the raised platform that had been rebuilt many times along the northwest wall, the question of whether the partially exposed mihrab had played even a minor role in the function of the room became even more enigmatic. Ten fragments of these smooth clay molds were recovered (Wilkinson, *Nishapur: Pottery*, pp. 333-35, figs. 190-99). The two most complete molds are reproduced here, in the context of their provenance (Figure 1.52).

What was made in these molds remains a question, and although the intricate designs are remarkably clear and sharp, what they depict remains a



mystery. The stranger of the two shows a pair of winged figures with grotesque faces flanking a vertical bar that has a trefoil at each end. Below the bar two figures with what may be either horns or crescents on their heads kneel as they gaze upward as though in adoration. Between them, immediately below the bar, is a shape resembling an hourglass divided by two narrow, hatched bands. On either side of the hourglass shape are three dotted circles. Beneath it is an inverted ogee also ending in a trefoil, of which two of the elements, surprisingly enough, are parrots' heads. Filling the ogee—written upside down and not in mirror reverse as would be proper in a mold—are these words in Kufic: 'am[l] Muhamma[d]' (made by Muhammad). The creator of the mold was thus a Muslim, although the subjects he has depicted are anything but orthodox Islamic. The vertical bar in the center could be a Christian borrowing (in some Islamic copies of Byzantine coins the transverse bar of the cross is omitted; see Walker, *Catalogue*, pp. xxii–xxiii, pls. v, vi, viii). But the object beneath the bar could also be a Sasanian altar (a very similar representation of which is illustrated in Nikitin, "Monnaie Arachosie," p. 234, fig. 1). The birds' heads here need have no direct religious connotation; they appeared elsewhere in Nishapur in designs executed in carved plaster.

The other mold appears to have been made by the same hand. In its upper register a figure who may have held a wine goblet in front of him is seated upon a cushioned stool. This is a secular subject often associated with



1.52

(above) Fragments of molds found embedded in the platform along the northwest wall of S1. Well-levigated clay fired dull red with decoration that seems cut rather than stamped. Top: height 16.5 cm, width 9 cm; The Metropolitan Museum of Art (40.170.170). Bottom: height 14 cm; original in the Muzé Iran Bastan, Teheran; cast in The Metropolitan Museum of Art (40.170.283)



1.53

Tepe Madraseh looking south from U6, showing the southwest facade, 1940. The mihrab inserted between two piers at the middle level is in shadow just beyond the mass of fallen khisht in the foreground, which could be a collapsed vault

a ruler and common from the Turkish homelands westward to Sicily, where it appears in Palermo (Ettinghausen, "Painting in the Fatimid Period," figs. 7, 13, 15). Beneath the figure is a bird with outspread wings that bears a slight resemblance to many eagles found on textiles of the eleventh and twelfth centuries from both Byzantium and the Islamic regions (see Falke, *Kunstgeschichte der Seidenweberei* 2, fig. 251; 1, fig. 183). But this bird's head, shown full face, is round and has a somewhat human look. At each side of this round head is another bird's head, and below it is a figure in human shape, with crossed feet. The figure is clothed, which would rule out its being the Zoroastrian symbol of the equinox: the half-avian, half-human Garuda holding a nude Anahita, the goddess of fruitfulness.

That the design on the mold is simply a variation on the Ganymede theme seems unlikely. The bird is probably not an eagle but the mythical simurgh, the wise and beneficent creature who protected the weak. In the *Shah-nama* (Book of kings) Firdausi tells the story of the son of Sam, Zal, who was born with white hair. Ashamed of the freak he had begotten, Sam abandoned the infant Zal in the mountains, where he was rescued and cared for by the simurgh as one of her own young. The Sufi mystics pondered the mystery of the simurgh, a symbol of wisdom whose name no one knew. One of them, Sheikh Farid al-Din 'Attar, a Nishapuri who died sometime between 1200 and 1230 and whose tomb is still venerated in Nishapur, wrote a long allegorical poem, *Mantiq al-tayr* (The conference of birds), about the quest of thirty birds (Sufi pilgrims) for the *simurgh* (the truth of God). That "thirty birds" translates as *si murgh* allowed 'Attar to develop a typically Sufi play on words: when the *si murgh* find the *simurgh*, they find themselves. The round, sunlike face of the bird on the mold could also relate to a phrase near

the end of the poem: "Without speech came the answer from that Presence, saying: 'This Sun-like Presence is a Mirror'" ('Attar, *Conference of Birds*; a partial translation of the poem also appears in Browne, *Literary History of Persia* 2, pp. 513ff).

Thus within a few feet of a simple, trefoil-headed qibleh there was evidence of a far from simple belief in Allah and his prophet Muhammad. It seems that Farid al-Din 'Attar and whoever made these molds were acquainted with myths that were to some extent common property. No other objects were found in S1. As we shall see, however, equally strange but less elaborate symbolism was discovered in the paintings covering the walls in room W20, on the southwest side of the tepe.

Figure 1.53 shows the southwest facade for its entire excavated length. The enormous mass of khisht in the foreground was probably a fallen vault; note the exposed edges of the bricks standing on end. Just beyond the fallen bricks, to the left of center in Figure 1.53, a mihrab can be perceived in the shadow. This mihrab, the only one found in the southwest complex, had been inserted between two piers at the middle level of occupation; on the top level the recess had been bricked in with khisht to form a plain wall. As can be seen in Figure 1.54, taken looking south from U6, the prayer niche faced

1.54

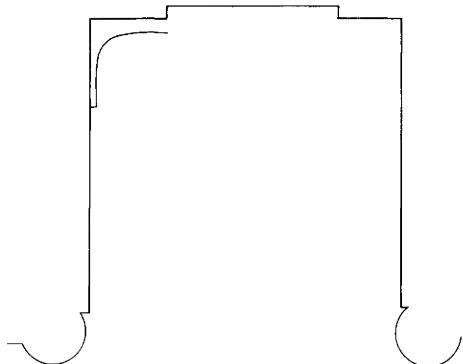
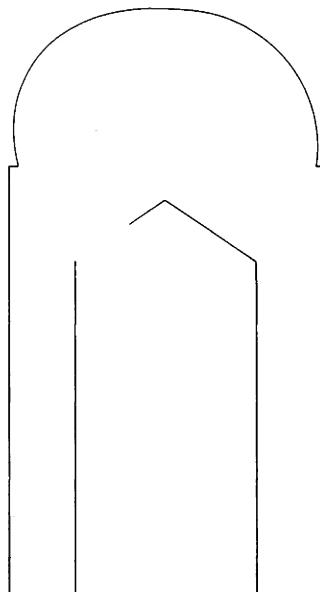
Tepe Madraseh looking south from U6, April 5, 1940. The mihrab is just to the right of center. The raised area facing it is the edge of the cultivated ground within the tepe, and the mound behind it is an excavation dump. The coffers in the foreground are exploratory holes





1.55

Mihrab in U6, middle level. After it was damaged the niche was filled with khisht. Plan and elevation of the back wall drawn by Charles K. Wilkinson



an open space. So far as we could tell it had been neither in a room nor part of a congregational mosque. Built on a rectangular plan, it had a floor raised slightly above the level of pavement in front of it, and it was framed by engaged columns and had a semicircular head (Figure 1.55). As on the vaulting found in H1, behind the prayer hall, there was a slight projection where the arch began to curve upward. The back wall had but a simple recess in plaster with a pointed top.

In the corridor (U7) behind the mihrab, we could see the start of an arch that very likely had had a semicircular head, like the arch at U6, again with a slight projection at the start of the curve (Figure 1.56). On both walls of the passageway were smooth white plaster dadoes approximately 105 centimeters high that also projected slightly from the wall surface above them. In the rooms of early Islamic Nishapur nearly all the dadoes, whether plain or

embellished with decoration that was carved or painted or both, were about this same height, for a very practical reason. Seated on a rug or a woven mat spread either on the smooth plaster floor or on a liwan, one was best able to appreciate detail and ornament in the decoration on the first meter of the wall. Decoration on the upper parts of the walls was invariably far simpler, unless it was in some way related to a dome.

Southeast of U7, at U8, the corridor had been partially filled in with khisht (Figure 1.57). The area southeast of U8, the center section of the southwest facade, was never completely excavated, although we did manage to clear part of the area when we returned to the site in 1947. (That work is not mapped on the plans.) The rooms labeled w, x, and y, extending around the south corner of the field, however, were dug to low levels. These rooms had been part of an important complex even at the top level, but here too, it would seem, the time of greatest splendor had been the earliest period.

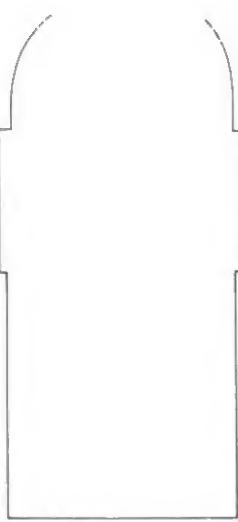
w2, originally a round coffered room elaborately decorated with patterns molded in plaster and painted in brilliant hues, and w20, a larger, square room whose walls at the lowest level were covered with mysterious, intricately detailed murals, had both at a later period suffered the indignity of being turned into latrines (see Figures 1.185, 1.198). The same sort of neat, raised latrine, with platforms so that the necessary ewer of water could be placed conveniently at hand, had been introduced at the top and middle

## 1.56

(below left and center) Passageway (U7) probably once headed by a semicircular arch. A dado about 1.05 m high projects slightly from the wall surface, which was finished with kahgil that had in turn been whitewashed. Elevation drawn by Charles K. Wilkinson

## 1.57

(below right) U8 looking northwest. Note the khisht fill in the corridor





1.58

Top level of w15 looking west, October 13, 1939. From the latrine near the doorway in the north corner we retrieved a bronze "inkwell"

levels of w15, a room approximately 6 meters square (Figures 1.58, 1.59). From the top level latrine we retrieved a cylindrical bronze object, probably an inkwell, that is inscribed in Kufic, *mawla al-amir 'Abdallah ibn al-Hasan Parsi* (Lord, the emir, 'Abdallah, son of al-Hasan Parsi). James W. Allan suggests that if the 'Abdallah Parsi of the inscription is the man who was



1.59

Latrine in the east corner on the second level of w15, November 1, 1939

khatib of Bukhara in 1036 and who took part in an embassy to the Ghaznavid court, the "inkwell," which is now in the Metropolitan Museum (40.170.116), may have been manufactured in Transoxiana in the second quarter of the eleventh century (Allan, *Nishapur: Metalwork*, pp. 44-45, 87, no. 105).

Other rooms in the complex had been furnished with a hearth: a rectangular curb in the center of the floor surrounding a circular hole in which a more or less spherical earthenware jar was placed to serve as a receptacle for charcoal (Figure 1.60). These fireplaces could of course have been used for cooking, but some of them must also have served primarily to supply heat for that most effective and economical means of providing warmth for several people, a kursi, or rectangular frame over which blankets are spread. Either a kursi or a metal brazier would certainly have been necessary in Nishapur, where the temperature in winter can drop to as low as  $-5^{\circ}\text{C}$ . Perhaps because the rooms at the lower levels of Tepe Madraseh were larger, the more homely form of heating by kursis was less prevalent here than in the more constricted quarters in Sabz Pushan and in the Vineyard Tepe (see Figures 2.4, 2.5, 3.7-3.10 and Wilkinson, "Heating and Cooking in Nishapur").

As was true in most of the buildings we excavated at Nishapur, nearly all the undecorated interior surfaces in this secular part of Tepe Madraseh were covered with smooth white plaster. In many rooms only certain functional architectural details—sinkaways, liwans, fireplaces—broke the monotony of the all-pervasive white. In contained courtyards, even the exterior



1.60

w4, middle level, where a hearth with a raised curb had been constructed in the center of the floor. The sinkaway at the left belongs to the upper level



1.61

x16 looking northeast from w15, October 4, 1947. The second of several layers of plaster floors in this room was painted red and blue. The steps shown here, the second set built, were later covered completely. The hole in the foreground is a sink-away

surfaces were coated with fine white plaster, though elsewhere the outside walls were often the natural dun color of kahgil, a mixture of clay, straw, and urine that was spread on the khisht walls. When smoothed with a float, kahgil is remarkably durable. The floors were also commonly covered with white plaster. In only one instance, found unfortunately in a hurried search for more information as we were about to hand over the concession in 1947, was there any indication that the plaster floor had been colored. In x16, a room between u8 and x13 in the unmapped area halfway down the southwest side of the square, where it is possible there had been a wide, formal entrance like that at s4 in the northwest facade, a small sondage revealed a floor that had been painted blue and decorated with curling strokes of red



1.62

Southwest facade looking west from Y9, 1940. Note the brick paving to the right. The area beyond, the center section of the facade, was never completely excavated

(Figure 1.61). Even though the piece of floor was so small and its condition so poor that no meaningful drawing could be made, the discovery supported our belief in the importance of the buildings behind the facade.

Square kiln-fired bricks were also used for flooring, especially in courtyards and other open spaces. Brick flooring must have provided a change from the monotonous white plaster, but as the bricks were merely laid either parallel with the walls or in simple diagonals, they can hardly be considered a decorative filling and so call for no particular comment. In some places, floors of baked brick were laid even though the walls were of *khisht*. The dimensions of these square floor bricks varied—some of them were as large as 28 centimeters on a side. Some old brick paving that escaped rapacious theft and reuse remained in place near Y9, at the south corner of the tepe (Figure 1.62).

In the structures clustered around the south corner it was clear that major changes had been effected between the first and second stages. In the area labeled x4–7 thick *khisht* construction of later date enclosed a row of

## 1.63

(*below left*) One of the piers (P2) at the south corner of the tepe, April 1940, when it had been freed of the later construction (the southeast wall of x6) in which it had been embedded



piers with engaged columns and carved plaster decoration (Figures 1.63, 1.64, and see 1.147–1.154). The piers had been part of a building facing northwest. To the northeast, in the area marked Y on the plans, was the beginning of the row of piers forming a facade on the southeast side of the square of cultivation (Figure 1.65). The small group of rooms from x4 to Y were decorated with carved plaster, and from them we retrieved pottery of excellent quality, Y2 being especially prolific. Also from Y2, from the lowest level, came the iron blade of a sword with the gilded bronze cross guard attached, together with the upper part of the hilt and two gilded bronze

## 1.64

(*above*) Pier (P1) partially concealed by later building in the west corner of Y1, March 1940



1.65

View looking west over Y3, at the south corner of Tepe Madraseh, April 5, 1940

mounts (Metropolitan Museum of Art, 40.170.168). The sword can definitely be ascribed to the ninth century (Allan, *Nishapur: Metalwork*, pp. 56–58, 109, no. 208).

Above the lowest levels of these rooms at the southern tip of Tepe Madraseh we also discovered fragments of molded stucco cornices and frames for windows. Some fragments of plaster framing retrieved from Y8, at the extreme edge of the excavated area, indicate that the room may well have been used by Christians (see Figure 1.184). A short distance from Y8 we uncovered vestiges of a brick square containing the remains of an octagonal room (Y10 on the middle and low level plans) somewhat similar to the ab-anbar (J1) near the prayer hall. This chamber was probably an ab-anbar, or, conceivably, a bathhouse. The ruins to the northeast and southeast were swallowed up in cultivated fields we were prohibited from excavating.

## BRICKWORK

### *The Prayer Hall and Environs*

So great was the destruction in front of the prayer hall (areas A, B, and C), from earthquakes, reconstruction, and pillage (Figures 1.66–1.69), that it is now not possible to reconstruct the building and its entrance even on paper.

Nevertheless, there were hints of former glory, and much can be learned from the little that was left.

Soon after we began to clear the area, slight excavation revealed that less than 10 meters from the north corner of the hall there had been a minaret (Figures 1.66, 1.67). The minaret was built of yellow kiln-dried bricks with beams of timber incorporated in its construction—a practice more common at Tepe Madraseh with sun-dried brick (though in either case it was the wood that perished first). All that remained intact was the square base, 7 meters on a side, and, on top of that, evidence that the next stage had been octagonal. Only one irregular piece of the octagonal shaft, which had probably been toppled by an earthquake, had survived; all else had been



1.66

C2 looking east over the courtyard (B and A6) in front of the prayer hall, September 21, 1938, when the square base of the minaret and the top of the brickwork facade along the north-west side of the courtyard had been uncovered. Note the slotted brickwork column at the lower left (see 1.73)



1.67

C2 looking east, September 25, 1938. The construction of the minaret and, later, the steps next to it destroyed the north corner of the earlier brickwork facade



1.68

C2 looking southwest, September 26, 1938. The prayer hall is at the top left; the inset brick panel shown in 1.72 is in shadow in the middle ground

carried away at one time or another after the initial destruction (Figures 1.69, 1.70). The diameter of the piece was only 1.2 meters, indicating that it must have come from very high on the shaft, most likely from higher than the muezzin's balcony, for it showed no sign of a stairway. It therefore seems a certainty that the shaft had no circular element. On the tenth-century minaret of Nayin the tapering octagonal shaft does become circular high above the base (Hutt and Harrow, *Iran*, p. 63, pl. 7), and that is also the case on the minaret of the late eleventh century at Kirat (*ibid.*, pls. 36, 37). The octagonal shaft on the minaret at Tepe Madraseh was not without a decorative feature: as can be clearly seen in the drawing, the bond was such that the surfaces were broken by vertical slits.

It quickly became evident that part of an earlier facade decorated with engaged colonnettes and spaced brickwork had been destroyed to build the minaret, unfortunately at a place where two walls of the facade met at right angles. The imposition of the minaret, to say nothing of some steps down into C2, which may have been added even later, made it impossible to know how the corner had been constructed, but as Figures 1.67, 1.68, and 1.69 show, what remained in situ of the northeast and northwest walls gave some idea of how the facades must once have looked. Figure 1.71 is a drawing of the northwest facade, which separated the courtyard in front of the prayer hall from area C2 (see middle level plan). The facades were made of kiln-baked bricks, or ajur, and it is highly probable that they were merely used as a face on a construction in khisht, a technique practiced in various parts of ancient Khurasan, as exemplified at Sanjan (Wilber, "Sanjan").



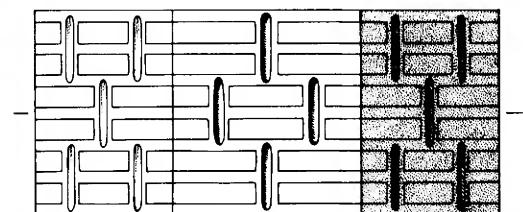
1.69

A6 looking west, October 5, 1938, showing the remains of the brick-work facade along the northeast side of B, the courtyard in front of the prayer hall. Just beyond the facade is the minaret with its toppled shaft. The hole to the left is the subsidence in B

There did seem to be a correlation between the size and the date of the ajur used in the structures around the prayer hall (which was not the case with khisht). The kiln-fired bricks used to build the decorative facade were 21 by 21 by 4.5 centimeters; those in the minaret, which was constructed later, probably during the Seljuq period, were 24 by 24 by 6. The octagonal ab-anbar (J1) northwest of the prayer hall was also built of large bricks, 23 by 23 by 4, and bricks of the same size were found in C5. (Across the square, however, large bricks were used in S4 for paving at an early date, and smaller ones served as footing for later walls.)

1.70

The minaret's octagonal slotted brick shaft, which broke some contemporary stone paving as it fell. Drawing, at 1:20, by Lindsley F. Hall



In comparing the brickwork of the minaret with that of the facades, one notes that there was one feature common to both. As the drawings make clear, the bricks were laid in pairs, arranged so that a sizable vertical slot separated each pair from its neighbors and so that the ends of the pairs on each course were above the centers of those in the course below. The mortar between the bricks was of considerable thickness, no less than 3 centimeters, apparently to insure that the slots were long and wide enough to make an effective pattern. Some plaster remained in the gaps, but care had been taken to leave a clear slot for ornamental purposes.

The same kind of slotted brickwork is to be seen in an Abbasid mosque at Balkh, where the columns are also of similar construction (Golombek, "Mosque at Balkh," fig. 12; Melikian-Chirvani, "Balkh"). In a mosque built in the first half of the eleventh century at Farumad in Khurasan, the slots between the staggered pairs of bricks are filled with decorative plugs, which transforms the original impact from one of stark contrast to a more delicate form of chiaroscuro (Godard, "Khorasan," figs. 5, 78). This technique of filling the slots with plugs is also to be observed at Rabat-i Sharaf, a caravanserai built a century later near Merv in northeastern Iran (Hutt and Harrow, *Iran*, p. 42, pl. 10, pp. 120-21, pls. 64, 65; "Long Forgotten Caravanserai"). No plugs of this nature were found in Tepe Madraseh, but this device was not unknown in Nishapur, for some decorative plugs were found together with other ornamental insets at a spot known in the 1930s as the Falaki (see Figure 1.94). The governor of Nishapur wished to build a resthouse and circular garden (*falaki*) at the newly created road junction near the two

1.71

Brickwork facade along the northwest side of B (see 1.67, 1.68, 1.72). Elevation and plan, at 1:40, drawn by Lindsley F. Hall





1.72

Brick panel flanked by engaged columns at the north end of the facade, looking southeast from C2, November 30, 1938

columns that had been erected in honor of the scholar and poet Omar Khayyam, and the Museum's expedition was asked to make a shallow excavation before construction began. We found the remains of structures that seemed to be of the late twelfth century, but only a small area of what had once been a site covered with buildings could be dug (Wilkinson, "Iranian Expedition," pp. 21-22, fig. 29).

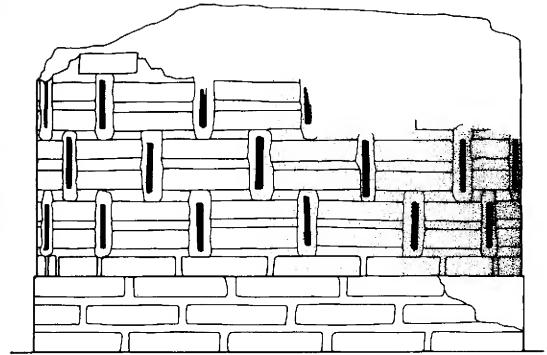
We had no way of knowing how high the brick facade enclosing the courtyard had been. It survived to its greatest height at the north corner of the prayer hall, where it ended in a rather mysterious way with a group of plainly bonded bricks with an irregular edge at right angles to a khisht wall. What seemed to be a blank panel was flanked by a pair of engaged columns on the left and but one on the right, all three constructed of slotted brickwork (Figure 1.72, and see 1.71). In the panel between the columns it was obvious that changes had been made, for above several normally laid bricks, a group of square bricks had been stood on edge to face the khisht wall. There was no indication that these bricks were ever decorated, though as we shall see in the next section, cut bricks were used as facing on khisht walls. The function of this columned enclosure is problematic; it could have been either secular or religious—the distinction is not easily made in medieval Islamic buildings, where the two purposes were so often combined.

The remains of four circular pillars—likewise constructed of slotted brickwork—standing on square bases were discovered in area C2, between



1.73

C2 looking west, December 1938. At the middle level four circular columns, 1.4 m in diameter, of slotted brickwork had been built atop solid brick piers. Drawing, at 1:20, by Lindsley F. Hall



the north corner of the prayer hall and the minaret's base (Figure 1.73, and see 1.67). The columns, each 1.4 meters in diameter, were apparently destroyed when the facade at the side of the prayer hall was blocked by later construction, probably at the time the minaret was built. As the photographs show, there had been many changes in this area. For example, there was a gatch floor at 97.57 meters, another at 97, and a brick floor at 96, the base of which was at 95.8 meters. At the level of the brick floor's base was a mihrab (see middle level plan). That there was solid construction in khisht even below the brick columns can be seen in Figure 1.73. Many fragments of carved plaster were found in C2; they had perhaps been thrown there from the prayer hall itself.

A variant decoration of columns with slotted brickwork was found not far from Tepe Alp Arslan in a part of the ruin field the expedition called the Bazaar Tepe, an area where excavations had to be abandoned at an early stage. Here part of an engaged pillar was discovered in which slotted crosses formed the decoration (Figure 1.74). The drawing reveals the method of construction.

Much of the older brick construction in the courtyard had obviously been carried away, whether purposefully or in a haphazard way we could not tell. We know that building material was sometimes carefully removed for reuse. In *Tajarib al-Salaf* Hindushah relates that the madraseh Nizamiya the Seljuq vizier Nizam al-Mulk had built in Basra near the tomb of Zubayar was "even more beautiful than that of Baghdad." When it collapsed about 1230, "the timber and other material were carried into Basra and were used in the building of another Madrasa which they also called the Nizamiya" (quoted in Pope and Minovi, "Nizam al-Mulk," p. 245). Incidentally, the

man who built the Nizamiya in Baghdad was Abu Sa'id ibn Muhammad, a Sufi who was from Nishapur and had already built a madraseh there for the Nizam al-Mulk (*ibid.*).

### *Loose Bricks from Tepe Madraseh (B) and Other Nishapur Sites*

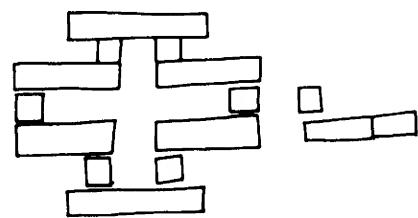
The bricks and tiles that fell into the subsidence caused by the collapse of the domed subterranean ab-anbar in area B were perhaps overlooked by those busily engaged in taking away reusable building material. These fragments had undoubtedly once formed parts of the portal of the prayer hall and the facades in front of it. It is unfortunate that not enough loose bricks or tiles survived to show how and particularly where they had been incorporated into the building, but a great deal can be learned from what remains. For the purposes of this discussion the bricks and tiles extracted from the hole are divided into two groups. The first group were architectural and/or decorative in function: engaged columns, bosses, string courses, and bricks carved with geometric or foliate patterns. The second group bear Arabic inscriptions carved in relief. Fragments of brickwork found at other sites excavated at Nishapur are included in the discussion where they are relevant.

**DECORATIVE BRICKWORK.** A few elements of an engaged column were retrieved from the subsidence in B (Figure 1.75). Whence this column originally came and what its other components were like are unknown, but as these sections have close to the same dimensions as two other sections with a carved inscription that were also recovered from the subsidence, it is possible, in fact probable, that they were part of the same engaged column (see Figure 1.96).

Several bosses were also found. One of them, fashioned solely of brick,

1.74

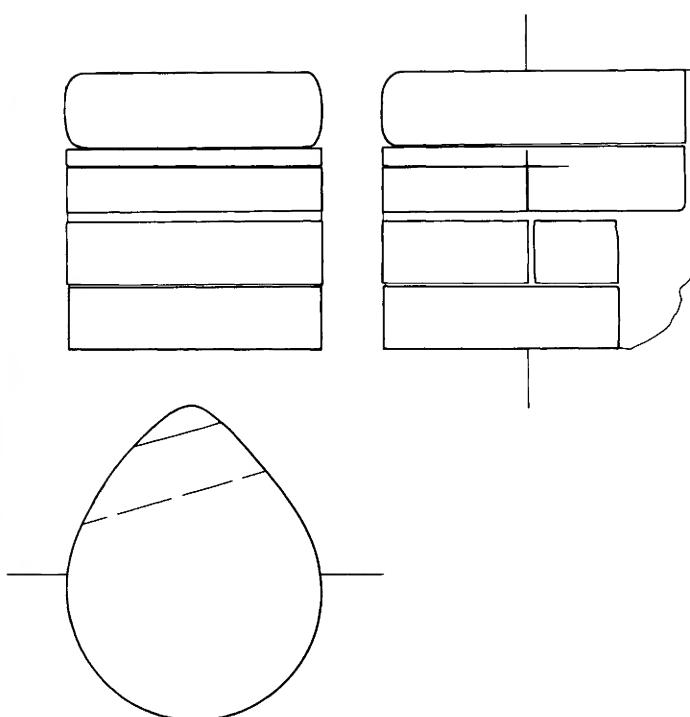
Fragment of an engaged pillar from the Bazaar Tepe. Yellow baked brick with slotted crosses. Height 20 cm, diameter 43–44 cm





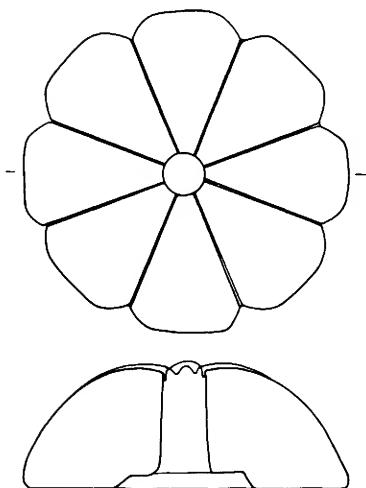
1.75

Four drums of an engaged column from the subsidence in B. The two drums in 1.96 may be from the same column. Red brick originally coated with fine plaster and showing traces of red and blue paint. Height about 21.6 cm. Drawing, at 1:6, by Walter Hauser



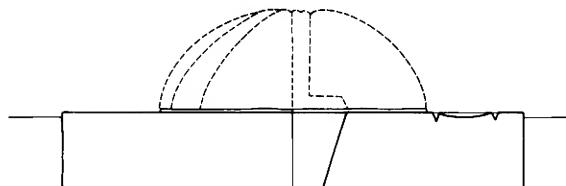
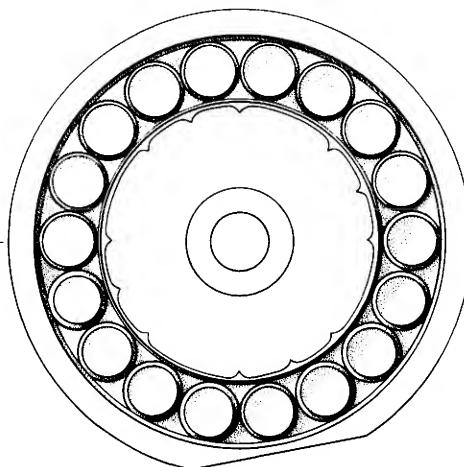
is divided into eight sections and pierced by a circular hole for attachment (Figure 1.76). Such bosses were apparently used in conjunction with flat, circular brick elements decorated with a ring of concave disks. Figure 1.77 is such an element; the boss that surmounted it could have been eight-petaled, though the marks left on the original plaster coating give no indication that it was.

In some instances the bands and disks on the elements and bosses seem to have been colored: traces of paint were still extant on the fragments shown in Figure 1.78. The concave disks on the narrow vertical edge and the horizontal bands on either side were vermillion, and the background was bright blue. Another small boss (Figure 1.79) was cut in such a way that eight pieces of turquoise-blue glaze could be firmly attached with plaster. No color was preserved on the framework, but it is possible that it was painted



1.76

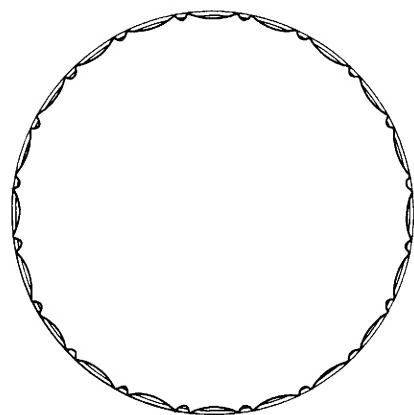
Boss from the subsidence in B. Carved red baked brick with no traces of color. Height 6.6 cm, diameter 17.3 cm. The Metropolitan Museum of Art (40.170.663). Drawing, at 1:4, by Lindsley F. Hall



1.77

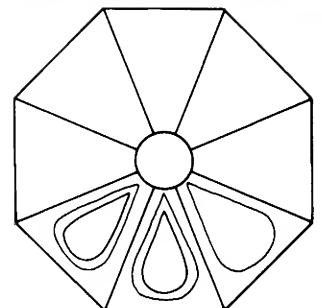
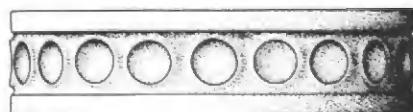
Circular element from B, meant to be used with a boss that may have been eight-petaled like 1.76. Reddish baked brick. Diameter 30.6 cm. Drawing, at 1:5, by Walter Hauser

white; the white background on part of another large boss of thick plaster with blue painted panels strongly suggests that this was the color scheme on Figure 1.79. The fragment of the large boss is shown on the left in Figure 1.80; it and the two fragments shown with it, one of them decorated with stars connected by swastikas, were reputed to have come from the area between the Vineyard Tepe and the shrine of Muhammad Mahruq. Yet another boss, of kiln-fired brick cut to form eight petal-like sections, was



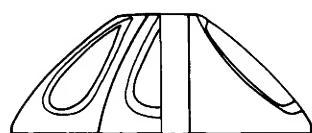
1.78

Fragments of circular elements from B. Top: carved yellow baked brick with painted red bosses on a blue ground. Bottom: carved red baked brick with a vermillion border and bosses on a blue ground; height 5.6 cm, diameter 21.3 cm; drawing, at 1:4, by Lindsley F. Hall



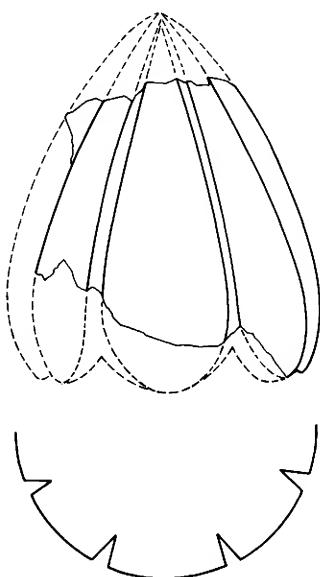
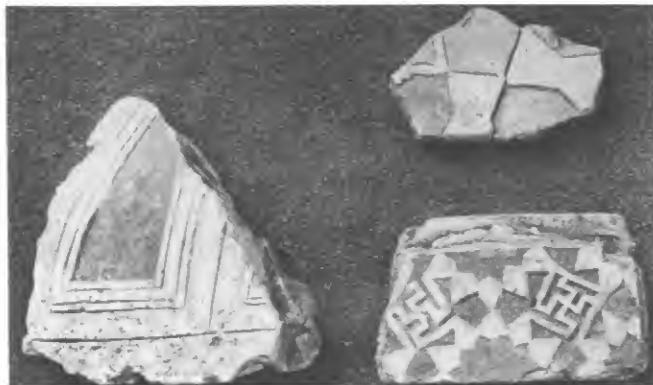
1.79

Boss from B. Carved red baked brick with turquoise-glazed tile inlays. Diameter 16.8 cm. Drawing, at 1:4, by Walter Hauser



1.80

Fragments of carved plaster from the area between the Vineyard Tepe and the shrine of Muhammad Mahrug. White decoration overlaid in graffato technique on a painted blue ground. Lower right: height about 10 cm, width about 15 cm (a piece with the same pattern and provenance is in The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 40.170.688)



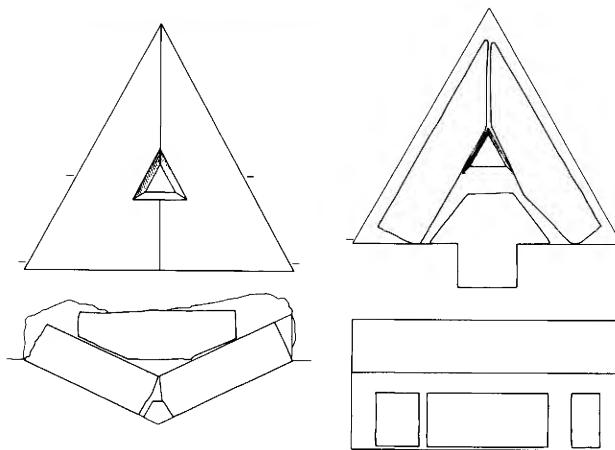
1.81

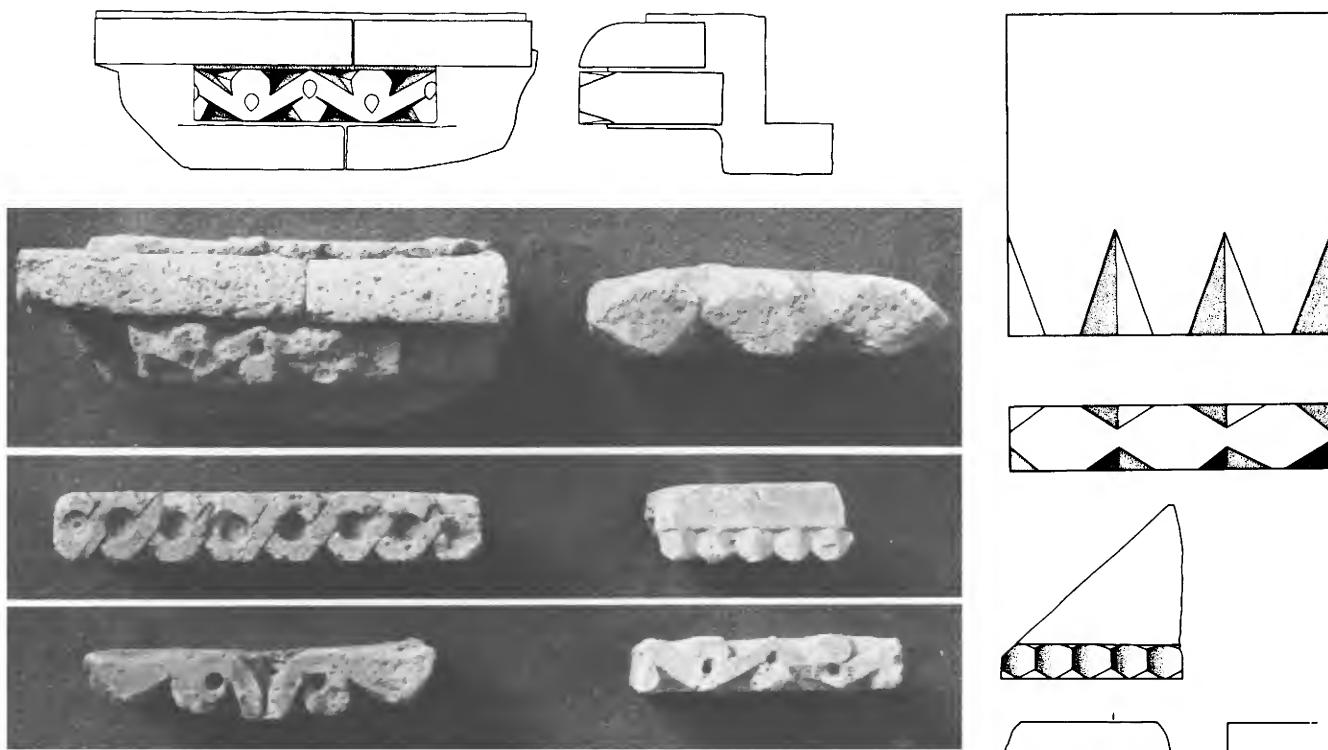
Boss or finial, possibly a tomb ornament, found between the minaret near the prayer hall and the road. Carved brick with "petals" painted yellow, lines between blue. Height 20 cm, diameter 15.8 cm. Drawing, at 1:4, by Walter Hauser



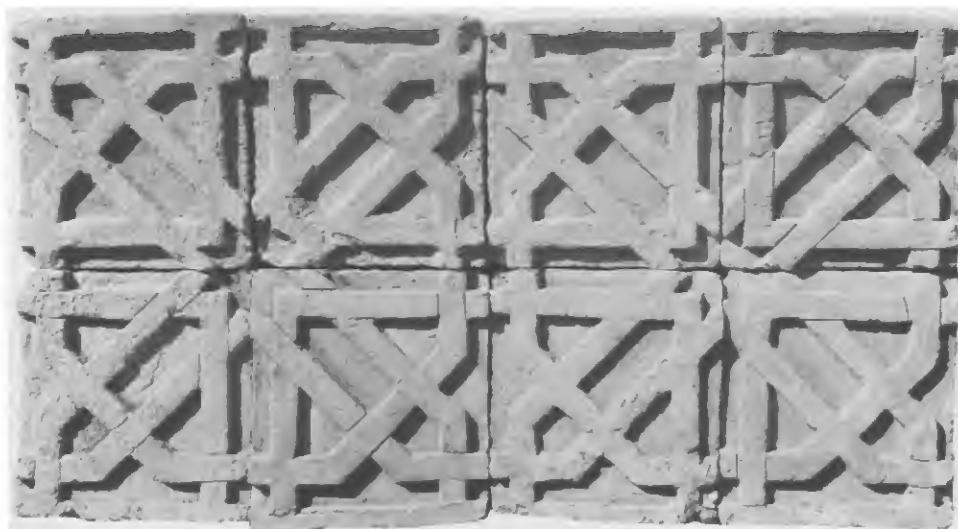
1.82

Architectural ornaments from the subsidence in B. Carved brick with blue paint in the recesses. Left: height 21 cm; center: height 24 cm. Drawing, at about 1:6, by Walter Hauser





The subsidence also produced a number of carved bricks that were meant to be laid flat on a wall to form a decorative panel. When four of these bricks are placed together, the strapwork forms a simple geometric pattern based on an octagon with a star in its center (Figure 1.84). Though even with merely light and shadow the effect is quite striking, the pattern takes on an altogether different character when color is applied. The color tracing (Plate 1) illustrates how the sunken background was enhanced with red and blue pigment. This pattern was used for centuries. A close variation

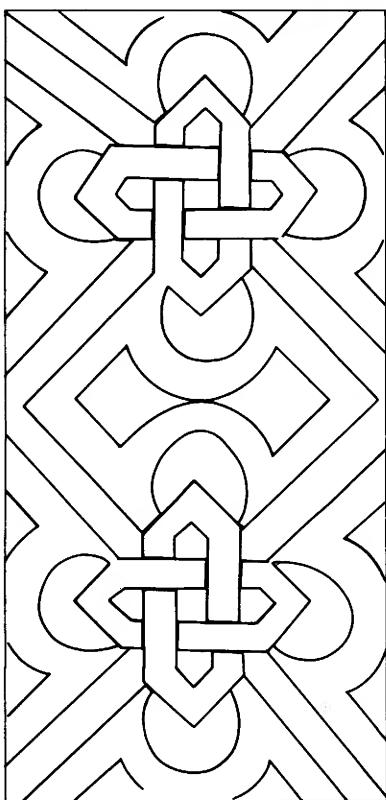


1.84

Brick panel from the subsidence in B (see Plate 1). Carved terracotta with red and blue paint. Height 47 cm, width 86.4 cm, depth 7.6 cm. The Metropolitan Museum of Art (39.40.67)

1.83

Fragments of string courses, bottom left from the top level of area M, others from the subsidence in B. Carved baked brick with traces of vermilion paint in the recesses. Left center: height 4.5 cm, width 26.8 cm, depth 28 cm; lower right: height 3.4 cm, width 17 cm, depth 12.5 cm; The Metropolitan Museum of Art (40.170.665, 666). Drawings, at 1:5, by Walter Hauser



1.85

Brick fragment from the Bazaar Tepe. Carved yellow baked brick with no color. Height about 24 cm. Drawing by Walter Hauser

of it is to be seen on the minaret at Dawlatabad near Balkh, dated to 1108-9, and again on the facade of the iwan in the shrine of Bayazid, built in the early fourteenth century at Bistam, though there the design is complete on one large tile, and by that time glazed tile rather than pigment was being used for color (Hill and Grabar, *Islamic Architecture*, figs. 168, 191; Hutt and Harrow, *Iran*, pl. 111).

Further examples of patterns in cut brick were found at the Bazaar Tepe. The crosses carved on a piece from a column have already been described (see Figure 1.74). The bold motif on another fragment from the Bazaar, consisting of two interlocked links (Figure 1.85), was much favored in Islamic art from the tenth through the twelfth century. That it was by no means confined to architectural ornament, even in Nishapur, is proven by its appearance as the centerpiece on a fine black on white glazed earthenware bowl from Tepe Madraseh that is now in the Teheran museum (Wilkinson, *Nishapur: Pottery*, p. 98, no. 19). Only a part of one flat brick was retrieved, but from that it was possible to develop the rest of the design, which, like the octagonal pattern described above, extended over more than one brick. The background had undoubtedly been painted, but not a vestige remained.

The change from geometric patterns to foliate designs in the carved and painted brickwork is almost imperceptible. An example of this is to be seen in a group of fragments from area B (Figure 1.86), where a four-pointed blue star is surrounded by four octagons, each containing an eight-petaled rosette against a red background. The pleasing design in the narrower border pattern in Figure 1.87, also from B, is of a definite foliate character, consisting of trilobed pendants linked by interlaced stems. The spirit of this particular band, which had a vermillion background, is repeated in the more elaborate example in Figure 1.88; one man could well have designed them both. Here too, the tips of the floral or leaflike shapes extend to form interlaced stems from which small pendant leaves curve out to fill the small spaces. The design is obviously most suited to a vertical band and was doubtless so used. The pattern is a traditional one that flourished, with some variations, in the eleventh and twelfth centuries in Khurasan and elsewhere. It appears, for instance, on the Rainer papyrus now in Vienna (Arnold and Grohmann, *Islamic Book*, p. 14, pl. 6A, p. 16, fig. 10). In a modified form the design turns up in the decoration of the tomb of Sultan Sanjar, who died in 1157 in Merv (Pugachenkova, *Iskusstvo Turkmenistana*, fig. 89). And in the Hermitage Museum there is a narrower (21 cm) cut tile from Afrasiyab that has a related pattern but without the same cleanliness of design (Pope and Ackerman, "Persian Ornament," p. 2760, fig. 951).

One further carved brick deserves description as it is the most elaborately decorated of all (Figure 1.89). The fragment was reputed to have been



1.86

Fragments of an ornamental brick band from B. Carved terracotta; stars once painted blue, background of rosettes red. Height about 24 cm, width about 34.8 cm, depth 4.5 cm. The Metropolitan Museum of Art (39.40.85)



1.87

Three bricks forming a border pattern from B. Carved terracotta with vermilion paint in the recesses. Height 22.5 cm, width about 65 cm, depth 6 cm. The Metropolitan Museum of Art (39.40.86)

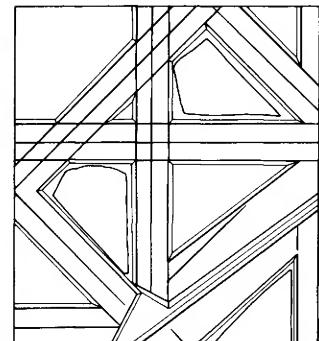
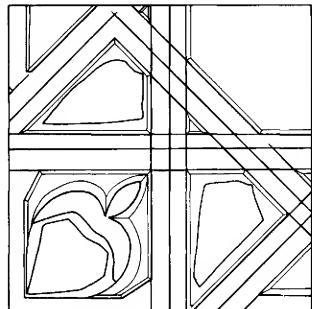


1.88 Fragments of a brick border from B. Carved terracotta with orange paint in the recesses. Height as shown about 45 cm, width 28 cm, depth 4.5 cm. The Metropolitan Museum of Art (39.40.84)



1.89

Carved brick reportedly found between the Mashhad Road and the tomb of Omar Khayyam. Height about 25.5 cm



1.90

(above left) Fragments of a brick panel from B. Carved brick with turquoise-glazed tile insets and traces of red paint on the background. Height about 30 cm. Drawing by Walter Hauser

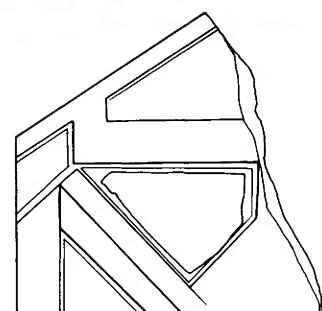
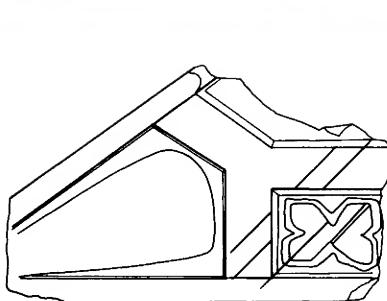
1.91

(above right) Fragments of a brick panel from B. Carved brick with turquoise-glazed tile insets. Height about 25 cm. Drawing by Walter Hauser

1.92

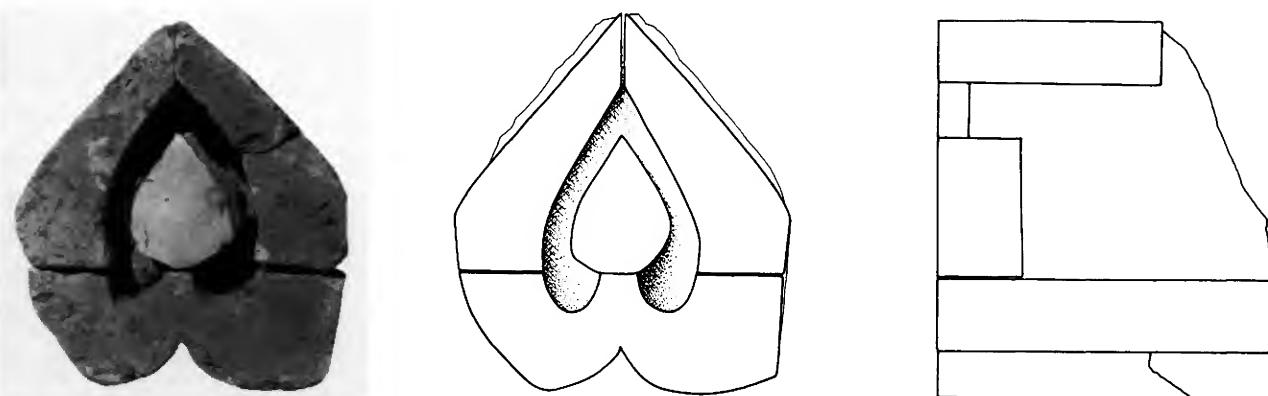
Brick fragments from B. Carved yellowish baked brick with turquoise-glazed tile insets and traces of red and blue paint on the background. Left: height about 12.4 cm; right: height about 16 cm. Drawings, at 1:4, by Walter Hauser

found not far from the Falaki, between the Mashhad Road and the tomb of Omar Khayyam. It is obviously but one section of a running band of ornament such as was used on a much larger scale to form the main wall decoration in the *Masjid-i-Jami'* in Qazvin, which dates to 1116 (Pope, *Survey 5*, pl. 523). In the Nishapur tile, the interior of the trilobed frame is filled with interwoven stems bearing trefoil leaves or blossoms. The designs in the spaces between the main elements would seem to be a further, more delicate flowering of the same tradition that produced patterns such as those in Figure 1.88.



Because the pigment has disappeared from the few buildings of the period still standing, the part played by color in Seljuq and pre-Seljuq architecture has been insufficiently stressed. The common use of pigment, usually rather thickly applied, on the decorative brickwork found in Nishapur gives us every reason to think that color was used on the carved decoration of these other monuments as well, even before the introduction of glazed insets. From the traces of pigment on the fragments that so long lay buried in Tepe Madraseh, we are able to re-create what has been lost, at least in the mind's eye.

By the eleventh century, however, other means had been invented to produce the much admired color blue. As Nishapur was a center for the manufacture of ceramics, it is not surprising that at an early date its potters



substituted alkaline glaze for lead, enabling them to replace the striking blue paint used on brick with dazzling blue-glazed tiles and insets. By adding a little copper to an alkaline glaze they could now get a brilliant turquoise, and by adding a little cobalt they produced a darker blue (see Wilkinson, "Persian Pottery"). The glistening blue glazes must have been considered very desirable; the innovation was put to practical use in the decoration of important buildings at an early date.

From the subsidence in area B at Tepe Madraseh we recovered fragments of carved brick, some with geometric patterns, one with a heart-shaped red-brick framework, that had insets of turquoise glaze (Figures 1.90-1.93). Such a combination of brick and glazed tile was used on the tomb tower built in the late thirteenth century at Radkan in northern Khurasan (Hutt and Harrow, *Iran*, p. 46, pl. 14). Several examples of stray insets, some of turquoise or cobalt glaze, the remainder of red or yellow baked brick, found at Sabz Pushan, the North Horn, and the Falaki appear in Figure 1.94. A piece of brick found at the Qanat Tepe that has lettering done in turquoise-blue glaze and a background of unglazed red may show how

1.93

Architectural ornament from B. Carved red baked brick with turquoise-glazed inset. Height 15 cm, depth 13 cm. The Metropolitan Museum of Art (40.170.664). Drawing, at 1:3, by Walter Hauser

## 1.94

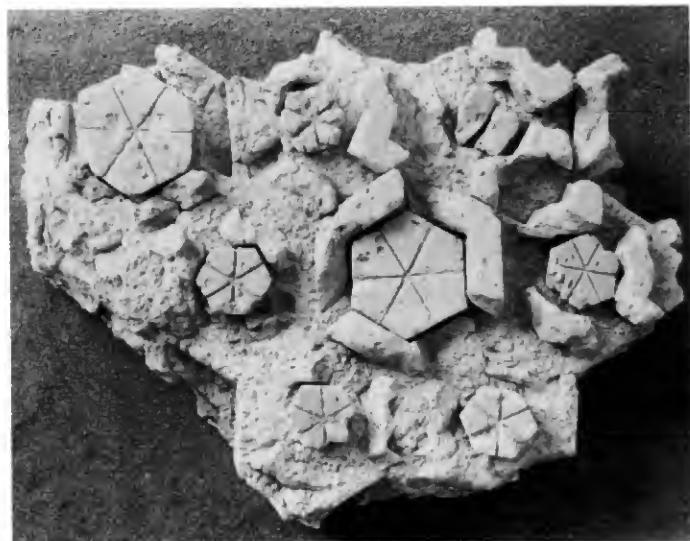
(below left) Brick ornaments and plugs, second row left from the North Horn, first and second rows right from Sabz Pushan, others from the Falaki. Left three in top row and second row left, turquoise glaze; top row right and second row second from left and right, cobalt glaze; others red and yellow baked brick. Scale about 1:7. Right three in center row and left four in second row from bottom are in The Metropolitan Museum of Art (40.170.167)

the potters combined techniques when they wished to use red and blue on one design (see Figure 4.3). No glaze or pigment had survived on an irregular mass of brick wall decoration embedded in plaster that was recovered from the Falaki (Figure 1.95). But in view of the lightly scratched crosslines and the unrelated pieces of glaze that survived in the detritus of this small site, it can be assumed that color had once been applied. The design in the hard yellow baked brick consists of large hexagons encircled by smaller ones, all with scratched lines dividing them into six pointed petals. A related geometric decoration has been preserved at Kirman in the twelfth-century Khwaja Atabeg Mausoleum, though there the hexagons contain cutout stars (*ibid.*, pls. 70, 71).



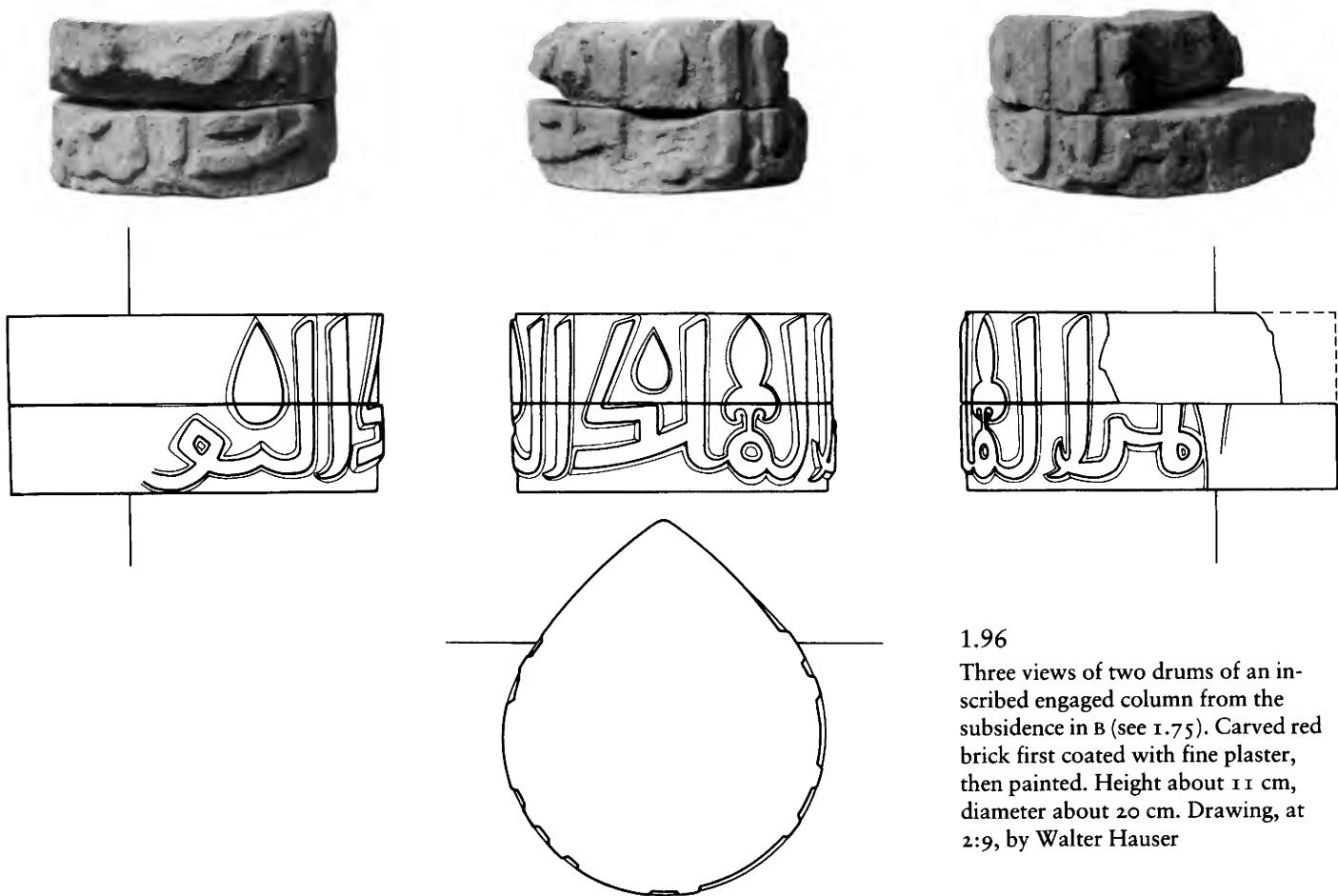
## 1.95

(above right) Fragment of wall decoration from the Falaki. Yellow baked brick plugs set in plaster. Height about 30 cm, width about 41 cm



DECORATIVE BRICKWORK BEARING INSCRIPTIONS. On several of the carved bricks from the subsidence in area B the background had been carved away to form raised inscriptions in Arabic. Although they vary considerably in style, all of these bricks must in one way or another have been associated with the facade or entrance portal of the hall. The paucity of what was left is most frustrating. A few hints are all that can be gleaned from the fragments that remain, and a complete reconstruction of the full texts is impossible.

The two drums of an engaged column found in this area have already been mentioned (Figure 1.96). The inscription carved on the drums appears to have included the phrase *al-mulk Allah* (sovereignty is God's). It is possible, in fact probable, that the elements of a plain engaged column from the area of the subsidence were once combined with these (see Figure 1.75). The



1.96

Three views of two drums of an inscribed engaged column from the subsidence in B (see 1.75). Carved red brick first coated with fine plaster, then painted. Height about 11 cm, diameter about 20 cm. Drawing, at 2:9, by Walter Hauser

dimensions are nearly the same, and all have a peculiar pointed rear section, a clear indication that the column was embedded in a khisht wall and not in one of ajur.

One group of bricks, each approximately 21 centimeters square and 5.5 centimeters thick, form a running inscription in Kufic when they are joined together. The brick cutter made no attempt to fit the letters into separate squares, so that individual letters sometimes spread over two bricks. This suggests that the bricks were placed together on the ground to be cut and then placed on a wall, or wherever they were installed, with very little mortar between them. In the section of the inscription that has been assembled at the Metropolitan Museum (Figure 1.97), the expression *al-mulk Allah* is repeated, but examination of all the bricks retrieved (Nishapur photographs 38N81-84) shows that this was not the entire text.

It will be noted that the alifs in this inscription have simple, sloping tops, whereas the kafs end in two-part foliations. The mims are flat, not round, at the bottom, and, in keeping with a calligraphic style to be seen in the black on white ware of Nishapur (see Wilkinson, *Nishapur: Pottery*,

1.97

Reconstructed panel of Kufic inscription from the subsidence in B. Carved red baked brick with a coat of thin white plaster on the bottom edge. Height 22 cm, width 71 cm, depth 5.5 cm. The Metropolitan Museum of Art (39.40.59)



p. 99, no. 22, a bowl found at Sabz Pushan that is now in the Metropolitan Museum, 38.40.118), they are surmounted by bold fleurs-de-lis that extend to the top border. Whoever drew this inscription to be carved in relief on the bricks evidently had a fear of leaving anything blank, for not only are the mims made to fill the band, but every odd space between or below the letters is filled with either dots, Vs, or toothlike projections. Traces of orange were found on the letters, probably what was left of a coating of vermillion. The letters had first been painted white, very likely a priming coat so that the red, which was more costly, would not sink into the brick. The background could have been white, but there remains a possibility that it was blue, as was the case on a much nobler brick inscription that may once have graced the entryway to the prayer hall (Figures 1.98–1.111).

Only a few of these taller rectangular terracotta slabs were found intact, and not enough of them survived for us to guess what the inscription originally said. Judging from those complete enough to measure, the size of the bricks varied considerably: their thickness is a consistent 9 centimeters, but some are as tall as 58 centimeters, others no more than 52, and the widths range from 32.5 to 26 centimeters. Despite the discrepancies in surface dimensions, there is little doubt that all of these bricks were part of the same inscription. The Iranian craftsmen would have had no difficulty in fitting them together so that from the ground, a considerable distance below, the differences were imperceptible.

The fragments give but a hint or two as to the nature of the inscription. The letters that remain suggest, for example, that the words *sultan* and *azam* (powerful) were included, so the complete inscription must surely have named the ruler who had the prayer hall reconstructed. No grouping of the pieces, however, forms a complete, intelligible word. For a juxtaposition to be considered accurate both the lettering and the foliated background must agree, and no true fits were found, with the possible exception of Figures 1.99 right and 1.111 left and center; 1.98 right and 1.99 center; and 1.101 center and right. The material is thus reproduced here in toto, save for a few pieces that are little more than chips, for scholars to determine whether there are any conjunctions of words that might offer clues to the identity of the

## 1.98–1.111

Fragments of a brick inscription from the subsidence in B. Carved terracotta with traces of white under-painting and red and blue paint. Heights of complete panels range from 52 to 58 cm, widths from 26 to 32.5 cm, depth of all is 9 cm. Six of the panels shown in 1.98–1.101 are in The Metropolitan Museum of Art (39.40.58, 60–64); others are in the Muzé Iran Bastan, Teheran



1.98



1.99



1.100



1.101



1.102

Note that the top piece on the left panel is 1.103 center; the bottom piece is 1.111 left. Top piece on the center panel is 1.104 center; the bottom piece is 1.109 right. Largest piece on the right panel is 1.111 right

patron of this later reconstruction of a building that had existed, in one form or another, probably from the ninth century on.

The strong, graceful letters of this magnificent Thuluth script stand out against a rhythmic pattern of curling stems and foliation quite unlike the perfunctory dots and dashes that fill the background on the smaller Kufic inscription. Nonetheless, the calligrapher seems to have suffered from a *horror vacui*, for wherever he felt his foliation was not sufficient he has introduced small dots and added undulating stems with alternating leaves in the narrow spaces beneath the letters. The balance between lettering and foliation in this inscription from Nishapur is much the same as that to be seen on the eleventh-century inscriptions in the mosque of al-Hakim in Cairo, where beautiful leafy forms sometimes grow from the Kufic letters and blossom



1.103



1.104



1.105



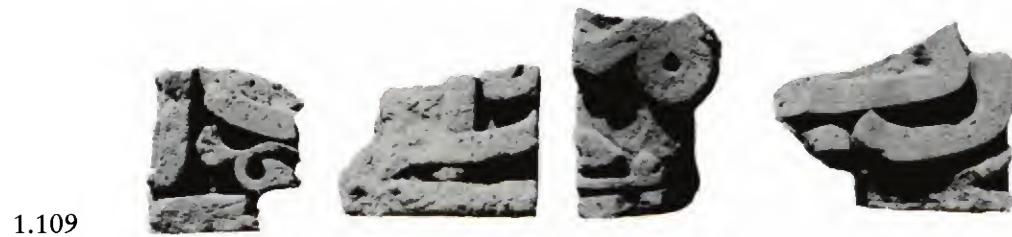
1.106



1.107



1.108



1.109



1.110



1.111

into the spaces above adjoining characters (Creswell, *Muslim Architecture of Egypt*, pl. 25d; Grohmann, "Floriated Kufic," pp. 210-11, figs. 30, 31). Almost the same balance was achieved at Damascus later in the same century, though there the foliate forms are more fanciful, and, like those at Tepe Madraseh, they are not attached to the letters (Sourdel-Thomine, *Monuments ayyoubides de Damas*, p. 148, fig. 90). When one looks closely at the lettering from Tepe Madraseh, one notices that all of the verticals have a distinct serif at the top, perhaps an early occurrence of this feature.

The tragedy of the destruction of the buildings at Tepe Madraseh has paradoxically preserved certain details that eliminate ambiguity and speculation. That these carved bricks had been preserved in a hole in the ground has by good fortune left enough of the paint on the surface of the letters and in the background for us to say that the inscription was once brilliant vermilion on a blue background. When the pigment was analyzed it was determined that the vermilion is cinnabar and the blue is ground lapis lazuli. Khurasan was well placed for the manufacture of a bright blue pigment made from lapis lazuli, which from time immemorial had been imported from the mines in nearby Afghanistan.

Blue glaze was used as a substitute for blue pigment on inscriptional as well as decorative tiles. One example (Figure 1.112) is noteworthy because although the piece also came from the area of subsidence near the prayer hall, the style of lettering is obviously not the same as that on the large cut brick inscription. The alif has no serif, and hanging knots that dominate the foliations and the letters themselves have been used in the decorative filling. Part of the border survived on this fragment, a series of interwoven zigzags, octagons, and squares. It is significant that a similar design, but doubled, is featured on the upper of two layers of carved plaster found in situ flanking the mihrab in the prayer hall and again on some fragments recovered from area C2 (see Figures 1.123, 1.125, 1.139–1.141). One other piece of glazed border from B (Figure 1.113) has a geometric pattern of a simpler nature that is related to one used in a border on arch soffits in the Masjid-i-Jami' at Nayin (Pope, *Survey* 5, pl. 511a). The border pattern appears again on part of a carved plaster dado found in area A (see Figure 1.133).

Six other small fragments found in various places in the mound harden the possibility that there had been other inscriptions in this ceramic medium on the buildings at Tepe Madraseh (Figure 1.114). That none of the fragments was found in place on a wall was further evidence of the almost



1.112

Inscriptional tile from B. Clay with blue glaze. Height 39 cm, width 24.8 cm. Muzé Iran Bastan, Teheran



1.113

(above) Fragment of a border tile from B. Gritty clay body with turquoise-blue glaze and a graffito design on the back. Height 16.5 cm, width 20 cm, depth 9 cm. The Metropolitan Museum of Art (40.170.655)



1.114

(left) Fragments of inscriptive tiles from areas B, E, and M, top level. Clay with turquoise-blue glaze. Lower right: height about 15.5 cm



1.115

Fragment of an inscriptive tile reputedly from between the Falaki and the Mashhad Road. Gritty grayish yellow clay with turquoise glaze. Height 30.5 cm, width 26.7 cm. The Metropolitan Museum of Art (37.40.23)



1.116



1.117

complete removal of decorative features from a site that must once have boasted considerable glory.

Fragments of blue-glazed inscriptions were recovered from other areas of the Nishapur ruin field. The most striking, not only for its color but for its bold script (of which unfortunately no vertical letters survived), is said to have come from between the Falaki and the Mashhad Road (Figure 1.115). Another large piece reputedly from the region near the South Horn has an entirely different character from any of the others (Figure 1.116). The foliations are in another style, the letters are much smaller, and the heads of the alifs, unlike those on either the glazed or the unglazed inscriptions found in Tepe Madraseh, have a small but distinct serif. On a fragment from the Qanat Tepe, only the surface of the letters is glazed; the background is red pigment (see Figure 4.3). It is possible this result was achieved by using an otherwise colorless glaze over a surface completely pigmented with a compound containing copper.

Two fragments of yet another inscription in glazed tile, of which nothing is known of its provenance but that it came from the ruin field of Nishapur, are shown in Figure 1.117. The style of this inscription is utterly unlike that of any of those already described. The curling stems in the background are very thin, the half-leaves are small but have large, flowerlike terminals, and the verticals are tall and sharply tapering.

#### CARVED STONE, CARVED AND MOLDED PLASTER

##### *The Prayer Hall and Environs*

A lozenge-shaped inset of alabasterlike stone found in area B suggests that there may have been carved decoration in that medium in or near the prayer hall (Figure 1.118). Carved stone fragments were also found in H14, near the south corner of the hall (Nishapur photographs 39N529-31, Metropolitan Museum of Art) and in the Vineyard Tepe (see Figures 2.9, 2.10).

Evidence that there had been decoration in carved and painted plaster in and around the prayer hall was revealed at a very early stage in the excavations. Fragments of carving were retrieved from areas A, B, and C at the front and side of the hall and from the court (E1) in the complex behind

1.116

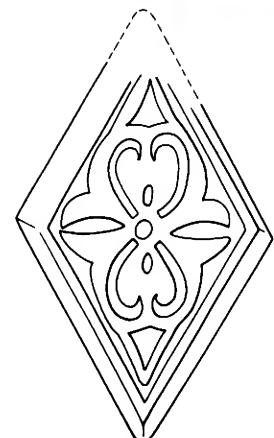
Fragment of an inscriptive tile from the South Horn. White clay with turquoise glaze. Height 28 cm, width 25.4 cm. The Metropolitan Museum of Art (37.40.24)

1.117

Fragments of an inscriptive tile from Nishapur, exact provenance unknown. Clay with turquoise glaze. Height about 42 cm, width about 53 cm

it. Inside the hall itself, on the top level, we found loose pieces of carved plaster in the north corner of the northeast wall, but none near any of the other walls. On the floor below we discovered the only carving still in situ in the buildings excavated around the east corner of the square. All that remained in place was part of one panel on the mihrab and a narrow strip near the floor on the southwest wall. So little of the carved plaster decoration was retrieved from the prayer hall, even in fragments, that one suspects it was purposely removed.

On the few fragments of carved plaster found in the north corner of the hall above the topmost complete gatch floor exposed by the excavations (see Figure 1.111), traces of red, blue, yellow-ocher, and white pigment had been preserved. What remained on the group shown in the top row in Figure 1.119 indicated that the plain borders, like most of the framing elements on the carved decoration from ancient Nishapur, were yellow-ocher. The raised designs were white, the cut grooves behind the swastikas had been painted blue, and the squares enclosing pierced quatrefoils were red. A few of the pieces could be fitted together to reveal that the swastika and quatrefoil pattern was not always restricted to narrow bands, as it was on the fragments with a very similar design discovered in area A outside the prayer hall (see Figure 1.130). An identical repetitive motif was used in the plasterwork in a mosque in the ruined city called Mashhad-i-Misriyan (Place of the Martyrdom of the Egyptians), which lies off the eastern coast of the Caspian Sea. Samuel Flury considers the mosque to be later than 950, possibly near the end of the tenth or the beginning of the eleventh century (Flury, "Mihrab



1.118

Decorative inset from B, evidently once affixed by a central nail. Carved alabasterlike stone with a background probably once painted blue. Height about 14 cm, width about 9 cm. Muzé Iran Bastan, Teheran. Drawing by Walter Hauser



1.119

Fragments of carved plaster found on the high level gatch floor in the north corner of the prayer hall. Traces of red and blue paint in the recesses, yellow on the broader borders. Width of top row as assembled about 72 cm

1.120

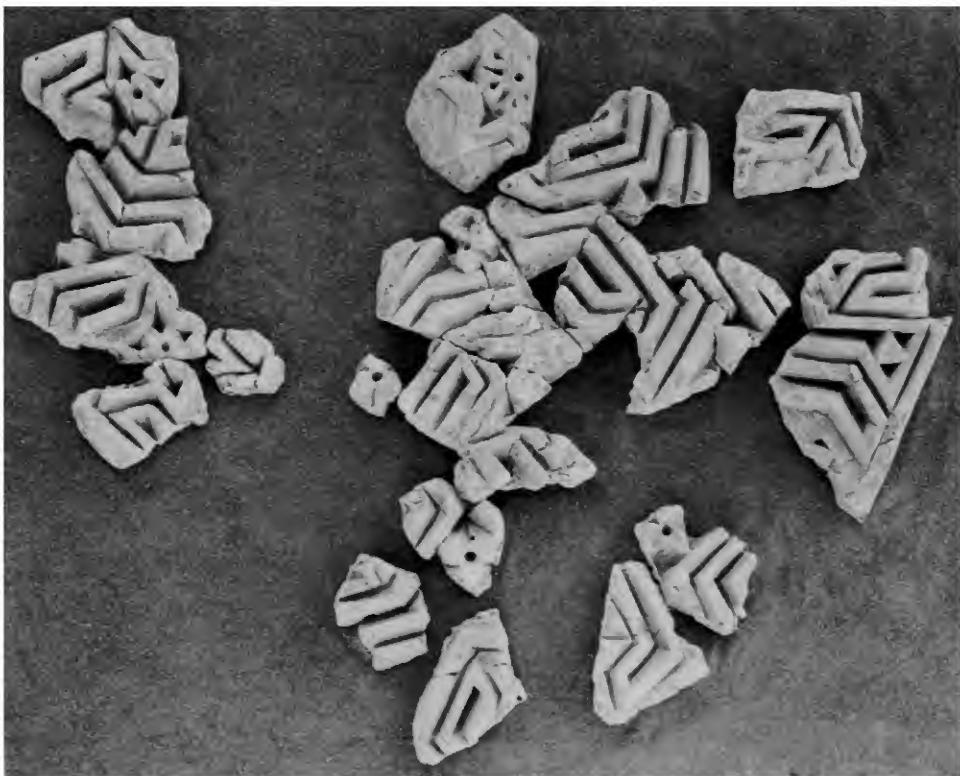
Fragments of carved plaster found on the high level gatch floor in the north corner of the prayer hall. Red and blue paint in the recesses. Width of pieces as assembled about 67 cm



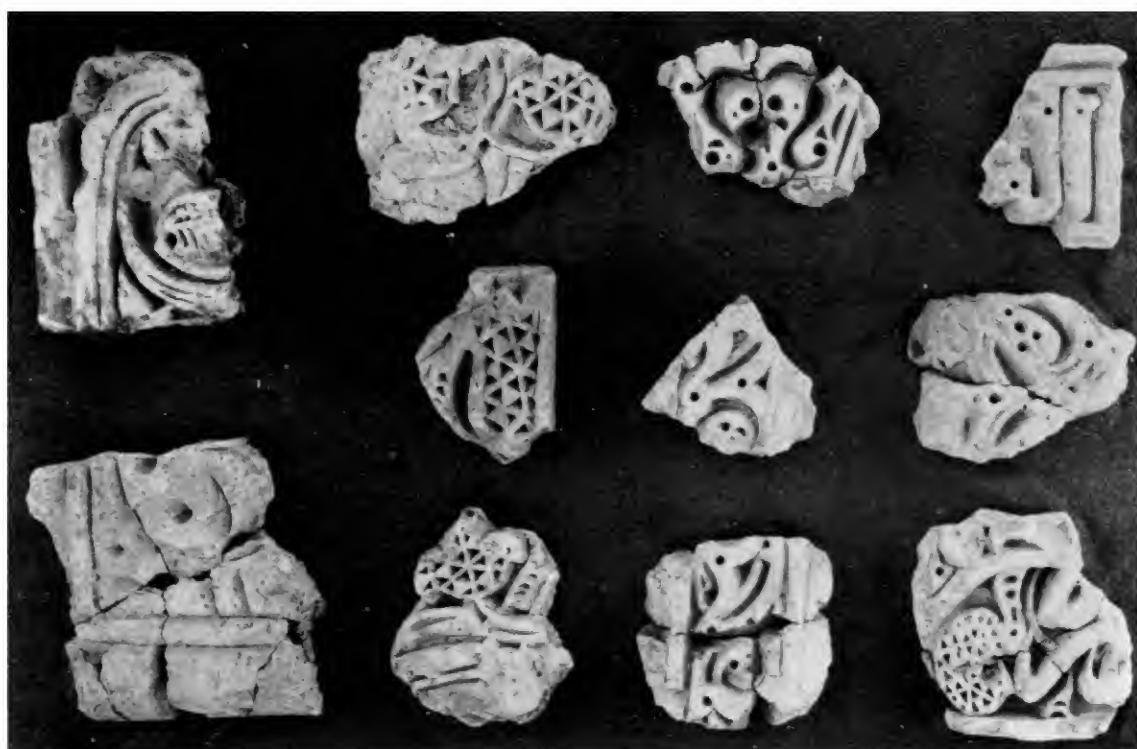
of Mashhad-i-Misriyan," p. 2723, fig. 923b, and see Barthold, *Historical Geography of Iran*, pp. 118-19). This is but one of the instances of similitude between the decoration of that building and the work found at Nishapur. These fragments from the highest level in the prayer hall, with their more stylized designs, cannot be dated earlier than the eleventh century.

1.121

Fragments of carved plaster found on the high level gatch floor in the north corner of the prayer hall. Red and blue paint in the recesses. Width of pieces as assembled about 82 cm



Other fragments found in the same corner had also been parts of intricate geometric patterns (Figures 1.119, four at bottom right, 1.120, 1.121), but not enough of them survived to ensure accurate reconstructions of the overall designs. The fragments shown in Figure 1.122 are particularly important, not only because the patterns incorporate different types of ornaments—including flowerlike terminals with deep triangular slotting—but also, and even more significantly, because two of them give evidence that in



at least one place inside the prayer hall there had been an inscription in carved plaster. The scrap of lettering on the upper right of Figure 1.122 forms the last part of *Allah*; the fragment on the bottom right shows that at least some of the lettering was in cursive script.

The prayer hall had been rebuilt many times, but on all levels there was a mihrab in the center of the southwest wall. Nothing survived of the mihrab at the highest level (see Figures 1.10, 1.11). But when the topmost white plaster floor was removed, some of the carved plaster decoration on the niche contemporary with the complete floor 30 centimeters below was revealed (see Figure 1.12). Only the lower portion of the rectangular mihrab survived; the rest had been destroyed by later construction. Very little was left of the interior decoration: none whatsoever was left on the back wall, which marked the qibleh, and on the left side, where there had been two

1.122

Fragments of carved plaster found on the high level gatch floor in the north corner of the prayer hall. Traces of red, blue, and yellow paint on some of the pieces. Bottom right: height 19.4 cm, width 18.7 cm, depth 6 cm; The Metropolitan Museum of Art (40.170.682)

1.123

Mihrab on the second level from the top in the southwest wall of the prayer hall (see 1.12). Part of the strip of carved plaster dado on the wall to the right of the niche has already been removed



1.124

(below left) Carved plaster panel removed from the left wall of the mihrab in the prayer hall (see 1.123). Height about 56.5 cm, width about 74 cm

panels of carving enclosed in a running border, only the bottom of the right-hand panel remained (Figure 1.123). The one element of the filling that survived can be seen clearly in Figure 1.124, taken after the plaster had been removed from the wall. The curled half-palmette has a fringed edge of a type also seen in the carved decoration discovered in the Vineyard Tepe and in Sabz Pushan (see Figures 2.29–2.32, 3.42). There is no oblique cutting on this palmette, as there is on some of those in the Sabz Pushan panel. We can only speculate, but it is possible that both types of leaves were also rep-



resented in this design. The beveled border around the design is a feature also to be seen in a smaller panel at Sabz Pushan (see Figure 3.22). The running band of deeply cut elongated hexagons that forms the pattern on the outer border, however, is unique to Tepe Madraseh. The lower section of the border here looks as though it was not fully cut out because of an error in spacing. Perhaps the artisan, having failed to map out his design in toto before he began to cut, decided not to finish it.

Only a bit of horizontal border, a series of long, stiff half-palmettes with curled tips, remained intact on the wall just to the left of the prayer niche; all else had been destroyed and removed when the many courses of kiln-fired bricks were laid to provide a footing for the upper level construction (see Figures 1.12, 1.123). Much more of the plaster on the right wall flanking the mihrab was still in its original position. Moreover, this was the only place in the whole of the ruin field where a clear sequence could be established in the styles of carving in plaster, for here there were two thick layers of carved plaster, the second spread over the first so that when it was removed it bore the imprint of the earlier carving on its back. When Figure 1.12 was taken, only a part of the upper layer had been removed; the later carving is on the left, and part of the earlier, or lower, layer can be seen to its right. Figure 1.125 shows both layers after they had been removed from the wall; the upper, or later, layer has been placed immediately above the strip of earlier carving it covered. How long the first layer of plaster had remained on the wall before it was covered over could not be determined. The difference in level was but 16 centimeters (the floor of the second level was at 97.4 m, the third at 97.24; see Figure 1.123 lower right), much less than any of the other changes in level, but in an area where there has been so much



1.125

(left and opposite right) Two layers of carved plaster removed from the bottom of the southwest wall to the right of the mihrab in the prayer hall. Traces of red and blue paint on the bottom, or earlier, layer. Greatest height about 44.5 cm, width about 230 cm (note that the photographs overlap)

destruction and reconstruction, heights of floor levels cannot be equated with lengths of time.

One glance at Figure 1.125 is sufficient to perceive the great contrast between the styles on the two layers. The simple leaf forms and palmettes in the earlier designs are arranged on vines that tend to form circles. The later carving on the upper layer looks bald by comparison; the forms have become more conventionalized, more geometric, and less free.

Parts of the borders of two panels were all that remained of the later carving; nothing survived of whatever designs had filled the panels. The horizontal border on the panel immediately to the right of the mihrab (on the upper left in Figure 1.125) matches the one on the skirting of the wall to the left. The palmettes in these borders, longer and thinner than the one on the panel inside the mihrab, are not unlike some used in the plasterwork found *in situ* at Sabz Pushan (see Figures 3.30, 3.31). The pattern on the vertical borders on this panel, a double row of freely drawn octagons filled with crisscross lines, is identical to the one on some of the fragments retrieved from area C2, outside the prayer hall (see Figures 1.139–1.141). The border on the right-hand panel of the upper layer is the same as the one on the mihrab (see Figure 1.124).

On the earlier carving the designs are much more varied and ingenious, and a few traces of color remained on this layer as a reminder that it had once been painted. Most of this lower strip is part of the filling of the main panels. A piece of the horizontal border existed only on the narrow panel just to the right of the mihrab (shown in the lower left corner in Figure 1.125), where the pattern of zigzags forming triangles filled with adaptations of palmettes is unlike any other found in Nishapur. The placement of the vertical divisions between the panels on this carving does not correspond with the layer above, and, judging from the one portion of a triple band to survive, these borders were much more elaborate. Two bands of tiny cut lozenges flank an intricate pattern of small palmettes suspended from an undulating stem.

The decoration in the panels on either side of the border, seen also on the surviving corner of the panel to the far left, is composed principally of small vine leaves joined vertically to bunches of grapes, their stems entwined in a somewhat improvised way. The design in the central panel, which has a simple border of which the center groove was red, is supplemented by stems encircling a palmette and two pairs of half-palmettes, one pair upright, the other inverted, whose curled tips suggest birds' heads. The tips of the palmettes in some of the carved plaster decoration retrieved from the Nishapur ruins do clearly represent the heads of birds. Here the likeness is merely implicit, and this could as easily be a continuation of the tradition of depicting pairs of wings with curling tips that was so prevalent in Sasanian art and

is exemplified in the sixth-century plasterwork at Ctesiphon (Pope, *Survey* 4, pl. 174a; Porada, *Art of Ancient Iran*, p. 212, fig. 114).

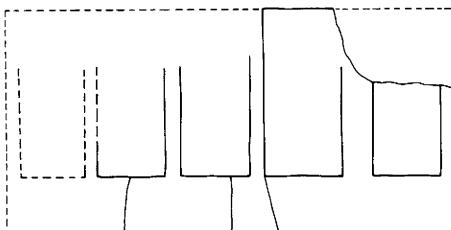
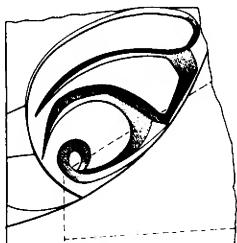
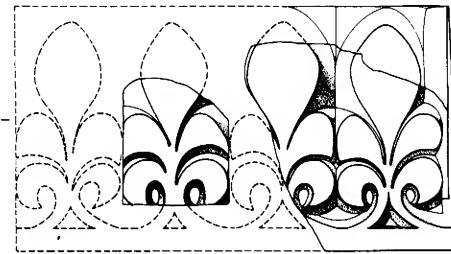
The scale of the ornaments in the earlier decoration in the prayer hall is small compared to what little remains of the upper and later layer; it calls to mind the cut plaster in the Masjid-i-Jami' at Nayin, especially on the columns of the mihrab, and also in a ruined mosque in Yazd (Pope, *Survey* 4, pls. 208c, 269). The carved plaster at Mashhad-i-Misriyan not only is similar in spirit, but some details, such as the suggestion of birds' heads at the ends of curving leaflike forms flanking a palmette, are almost identical (Flury, "Mihrab of Mashhad-i-Misriyan," p. 2723, fig. 923c). The long, stiff leaves growing from a more or less zigzag stem that form the horizontal border on the upper layer of plaster in the prayer hall appear both at Mashhad-i-Misriyan and at Nayin (*ibid.*, figs. 920, 924a). Although one might be tempted to conclude from this that the dates of the two layers are no great distance apart, the style of the carving on the upper layer is so divergent from that on any of the other examples that the repetition of this single element should not be overemphasized. A decorative detail may continue to be used for centuries.

Many loose fragments of carving in plaster were recovered from areas A and B, in front of the prayer hall, and from C2, near its north corner. A few others were found in the court (E1) in the complex behind the hall. Nothing was found in situ, but in some cases we were able to piece together enough fragments to reconstruct the original designs. Some of these fragments are so close in style to the carving found inside the prayer hall that one can conclude not only that they were contemporary but that they were by the same hand.

Two fragments of carved plaster whose function could not be determined were recovered from area A (Figure 1.126). The palmettes decorating the pieces, which may be from an impost or an engaged capital, are of a very distinctive type not common in Nishapur (at least no similar ones were

1.126

Fragments, perhaps of an impost or engaged capital, from A10. Carved plaster over a brick core, with traces of paint. Height about 14 cm. Drawing, at 1:5, by Walter Hauser





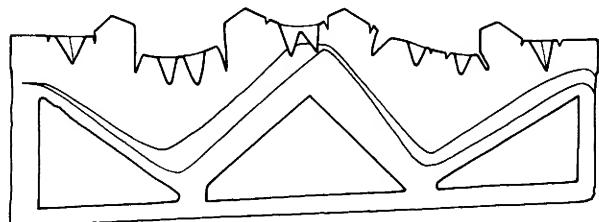
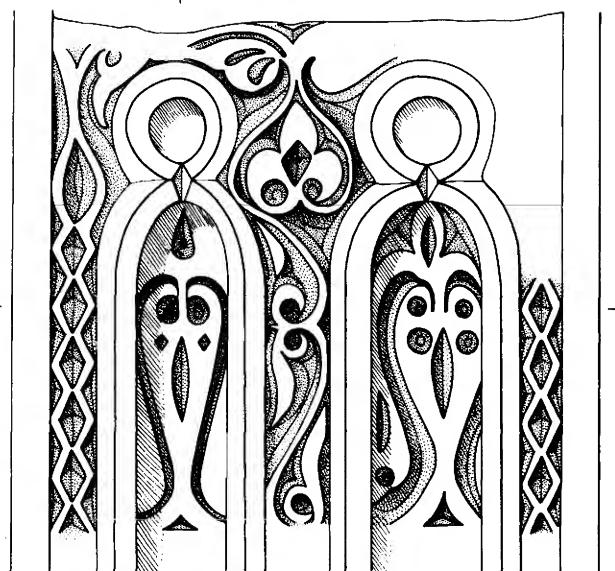
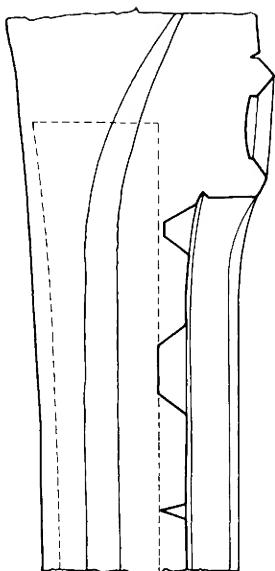
1.127

(above) Carved plaster finial or candlestick(?) from the court (E1) behind the prayer hall. Height 10.5 cm. Muzé Iran Bastan, Teheran



1.128

Capital or squinch corbel from A. Carved plaster built around brick. Height about 29 cm. Drawing, at 1:4, by Walter Hauser



discovered in the excavations). Though the coincidence may be quite accidental, there is a resemblance between these palmettes and some palmettes on the tomb tower at Resget, which has been dated to 1009 by André Godard ("Tours de Ladjim et de Resget," pp. 118-21) and to 1106 by A. D. H. Bivar ("Tomb at Resget," p. 20, fig. 3). A finial, or conceivably a candlestick, in a similar style was retrieved from E1 (Figure 1.127).

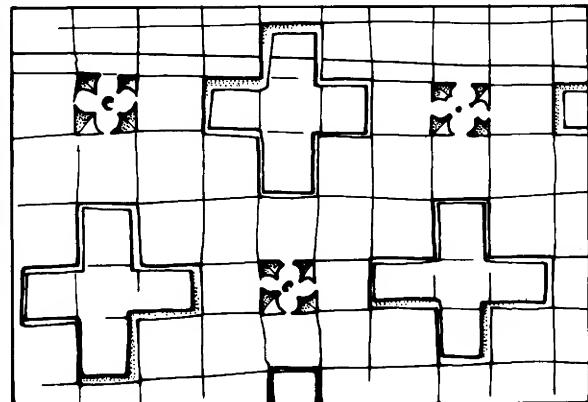
Also from area A came a plaster cap, or squinch corbel, built around brick. The cap is in poor condition, but the detailed drawing made by Walter Hauser restores some of what time had destroyed (Figure 1.128). The change in style is great from the plaster caps of the tenth century that are preserved at Nayin (Flury, "Mosquée de Nayin," pl. XIII). The style of the elongated palmettes on this corbel from Nishapur points to a date nearer the twelfth century, and the central ornamental device at the top recalls some cut brick decoration at Afrasiyab of that time, which has already been cited in connection with some of the carved bricks from area B (Pope and Ackerman, "Persian Ornament," p. 2760, fig. 951; see Figure 1.88).

The combination of brick and plaster seen in Figure 1.128 appears again in the fragments from E shown in Figure 1.129. The whole design was cut in a thick layer of plaster spread over baked bricks approximately 23 centimeters square that would have been placed flat against a wall of khisht. This technique is easier and less costly than using baked brick alone and inserting small plugs of plaster or terracotta. As can be seen from Walter Hauser's reconstruction, the overall design consists of sunken crosses alternating with small squares, each filled with a rosette that has become nothing but a quatrefoil with a circular center. The quatrefoils were white; the general surface was painted yellow-ocher.

Similar quatrefoils appear on a fragment of carved plaster from area A

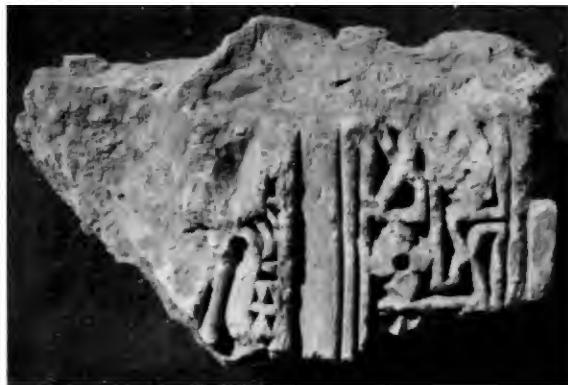
1.129

Fragments of wall decoration from E. Carved plaster applied to a wall of bricks (each brick about 23.5 x 23.5 x 4.5 cm); quatrefoils and crosses painted white, the general surface yellow-ocher. Width of pieces as assembled about 94 cm. Rough sketch of the pattern done in the field by Walter Hauser



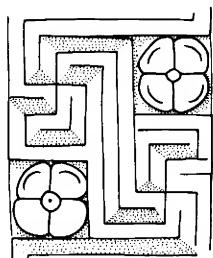
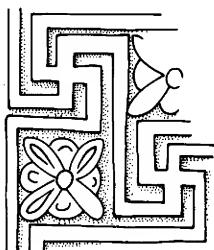
## 1.130

(right) Fragment of a carved plaster border from A. Height about 24 cm, width about 37 cm



## 1.131

(below) Design carved in plaster in a Sasanian palace at Kish. Drawing by Charles K. Wilkinson, after Baltrusaitus, "Sasanian Stucco," p. 606, fig. 181



## 1.132

(above) Design carved in plaster in a palace dated to the first half of the 8th century at Khirbat al-Mafjar. Drawing by Charles K. Wilkinson, after Hamilton, *Khirbat al Mafjar*, p. 205, fig. 149

(Figure 1.130). In this case, however, they are incorporated into the design of alternating squares and swastikas that appeared on the fragments found at the topmost level in the prayer hall (see Figure 1.119). The design is used as a border here; the plain bands on either side of it were painted yellow. This border pattern is a later version of an artistic tradition in Sasanian art exemplified at Umm Zatir at Ctesiphon (*Ausgrabungen der Zweiten Ktesiphon-Expedition*, fig. 25) and at Kish (Figure 1.131). The disintegration of the rosette into a quatrefoil had already been achieved when the design reappeared at Khirbat al-Mafjar in a palace built in the first half of the eighth century (Figure 1.132). Only a minor scrap—too small to allow any understanding of its original nature—of the main decoration on the fragment from A has survived.

A portion of a dado was assembled from several of the fragments retrieved from A (Figure 1.133). The part that remains measures 55 by 70 centimeters, but the dado would certainly have been around a meter high. Traces of yellow-ocher, blue, and red pigment still cling to the white plaster. (This was the basic color scheme on all of the carved plaster decoration in Nishapur; green was apparently used only for painting on smooth plaster.) The reconstruction gives us some idea of the imaginative way the Nishapur artisans combined panels and borders with different designs to achieve various effects. The panel on the right has a geometric pattern composed of four-pointed stars and elongated hexagons with thick borders on which the inner cutting is red, the outer blue. The style of this work is very similar to that at Termez (Denike, "Reznaya dekorovka," pl. 22). Separated from this panel by a vertical band of yellow is a running design formed by three strands interwoven not as a simple braid, but in the ingenious pattern that also appears on a fragment of blue-glazed tile from the subsidence in area B (see Figure 1.113). The glaze on the tile indicated it could not have been earlier than the eleventh century, but the border design goes back to the

tenth century at Nayin (Pope, *Survey* 5, pl. 511a) and to the ninth at Samarra (Herzfeld, *Samarra* 1). Between two more plain yellow bands on the dado from A there is a columnlike panel filled with cut stars colored red and blue.

Only a small part of the left-hand panel of the dado has been preserved, but there is enough to show that yet a fourth kind of cutting, with rounded shapes and floral patterns, was used. The twining stems here are grooved in a way that is unusual for Nishapur but common in the twelfth-century plasterwork at Afrasiyab and other sites to the east (Akhrarov and Rempel, *Reznay shtuk Afrasiaba*, fig. 68). The flat upper surface on the half-palmettes also suggests a later date, which would fit with where the fragment was found, at the topmost level in the courtyard outside the prayer hall. The style of the cutting, incorporating V-shaped slots, is to be seen at Termez, but in less imaginative designs (Denike, "Reznaya dekorovka"). The interwoven stems in this fragment from Tepe Madraseh add much to the liveliness of the design, which contrasts with the flatter treatment of the geometric pattern in the panel to the right. In this later work from Nishapur there is thus evidence of a love of variety in just one piece.

A group of fragments found at a high level in E1, some of them from a narrow cornice, were also carved no earlier than the twelfth century (Figure 1.134). Note the flatness of the surface and the groups of three dots, a device



1.133

Fragments of carved plaster from A. Traces of red and blue paint on the stars, yellow-ocher on the plain borders. Height 55 cm, width 70 cm



1.134

Fragments of carved plaster from a high level in EI. Touches of yellow paint on the border of the piece at the lower right. Width of cornice pieces in top row as assembled about 53 cm

1.135

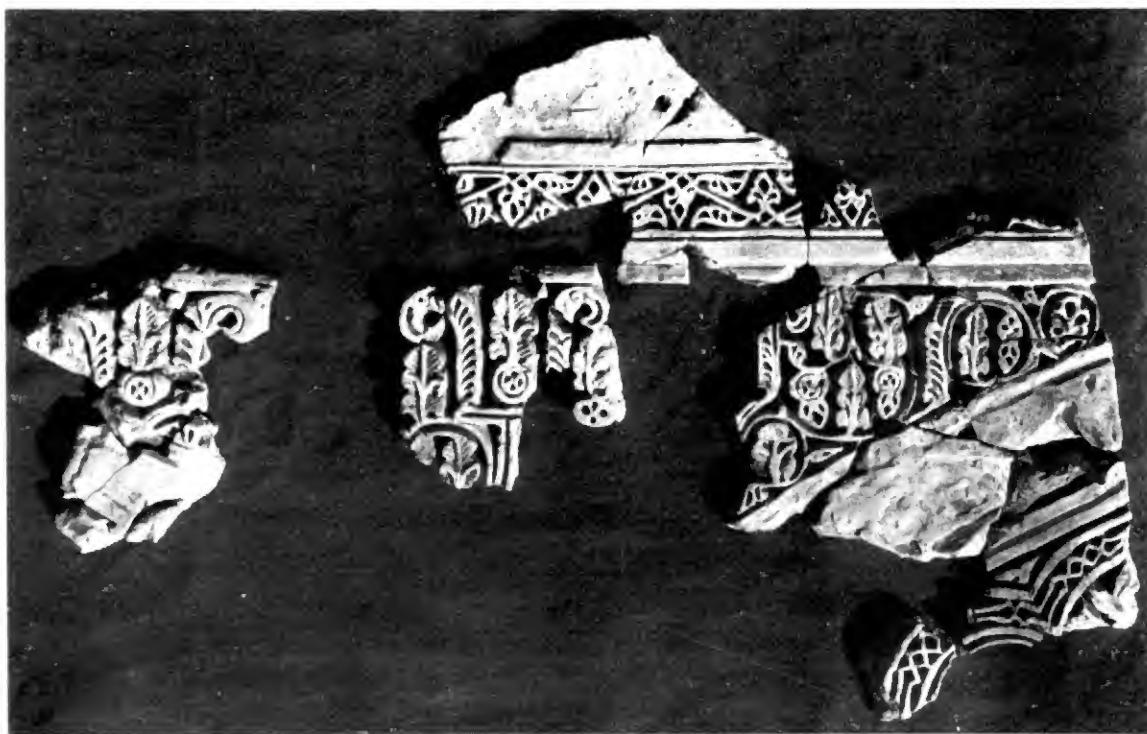
Fragments of carved plaster from A, some from an inscription in cursive script. Scale about 1:7



that appears in the work at Termez (Pugachenkova and Rempel, *Istoriya iskusstva Uzbekistana*, figs. 201–6).

Fragments of cursive script retrieved from area A (Figure 1.135) again prove that there was an inscription in carved plaster somewhere in or near the prayer hall that would surely have been contemporary with the tall lettering on the bricks recovered from the collapsed ab-anbar in area B (see Figures 1.98–1.111). The other fragments in Figure 1.135 introduce a new design element: the palmettes and other forms are decorated with elaborate patterns of cut and uncut triangles in a style that began to creep in at the time of Nayin in the tenth century and became very popular a hundred years later.

More carved plaster fragments were discovered in the area designated C on the plans, outside the north corner of the prayer hall, where below the top levels we discovered columns built of baked brick (see Figure 1.73). The fragments came from a higher level than did the brick columns, which were contemporary with the elaborate brick facade enclosing the area in front of the hall. The amount of building, destruction, and rebuilding in area C left an almost incomprehensible mass of rubbish, but some of the fragments could be fitted together to give a better idea of the scheme of decoration than did what was found in situ on the mihrab wall of the prayer hall. As no second layer of plaster had been applied to this decoration, the surface is in better condition and more of the color remains.



The group assembled in Figure 1.136 gives the impression of having been a spandrel above a cusped arch. The resemblance of this carving to the carving on the lower layer of plaster in the prayer hall is immediately apparent (see Figure 1.125). The groups of vine leaves and bunches of grapes that have lost their naturalistic appearance are similar, as is the way in which stems and long leaves enclose or connect them. Furthermore, the curling leaves, here ending in definite "birds' heads," that enclose a palmette reappear in this assemblage. Inside the hall, not a trace remained of what had decorated the mihrab at the time of the first layer left in situ on the wall flanking it, and we found no fragments in the debris on the floor nearby. It is therefore not beyond the bounds of possibility that these and other fragments from area C2 came from the prayer hall itself, from parts of the wall not covered by a second layer, and were dumped in this area just on the other side of an adjoining wall and near the steps leading to the forecourt.

The horizontal border above the spandrel is also very similar to one of the vertical bands on the earlier layer of carved plaster in the prayer hall. The same pattern of palmettes and leaves on a zigzag stem is seen again in work from the Vineyard Tepe (see Figure 2.21). And bird-headed leaves were found not only at the Vineyard (see Figures 2.14, 2.16, 2.18) but in the Village Tepe, just north of the Vineyard (Figure 1.137), and at Sabz Pushan (see Figures 3.20, 3.33). The bird's-head motif appears to be a survival of an old Scythian custom. Curved leaves suggesting birds' heads embellish two

1.136

Fragments of carved plaster from C2, probably from a spandrel above a cusped arch. Traces of red and blue paint on the beveled border at the top, red on the piece at the bottom left and the erased band of inscription at the right, blue on the border below it, and gray on the cusp at the bottom right. Width of pieces as assembled about 90 cm



1.137

Figments of carved plaster from the Village Tepe. Red paint in the recesses of the fragments of lettering in the top row. Scale about 1:7

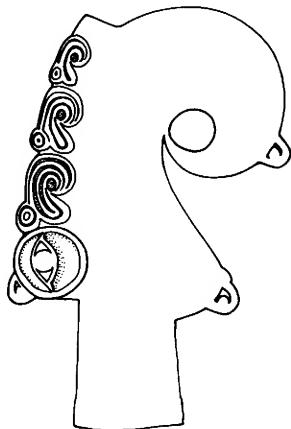
bronze pole tops from the Kuban that date from the seventh to the sixth century B.C. (Figure 1.138). The motif was used in general decoration in the ninth century at Kairouan (Creswell, *Early Muslim Architecture* 2, p. 32, fig. 234) and, on painted wood, in the harem of the Jausaq al-Khaqani palace at Samarra (Herzfeld, *Samarra* 3, int. 192, pl. XLII). It appeared in Egypt in the tenth century in the monasteries of the Wadi Natrun (Evelyn White, *Wâdi 'n Natrûn*, pl. LXXIA).

The band between the cuspings and the spandrel in Figure 1.136 would seem to have borne an inscription, but it has been purposely erased. Michael Rogers of the British Museum has called to my attention that in *The Muslim Architecture of Egypt* K. A. C. Creswell notes that inscriptions were effaced in Cairo for political reasons. Although such erasure is not usual in Islamic art, it could well have occurred in Nishapur, where political and religious faction was rife indeed (see Bulliet, *Patricians of Nishapur*, pp. 28–46, and Bosworth, *Ghaznavids*).

Other fragments from area C2 contain parts of what was once a handsome Kufic inscription (Figures 1.139, 1.140). Because the pieces are lament-

1.138

Scythian pole top from the Kuban district, Ulski Anl, 7th–6th century B.C. Cast bronze. Height about 28 cm. Drawing by William Schenck, after Borovka, *Scythian Art*, p. 42, pl. 25 (see also pl. 24)



ably few and of no great size—not a single letter is complete—it is impossible to recognize their import. The well-cut letters have slightly convex faces, and they are painted red and outlined with a narrow white border



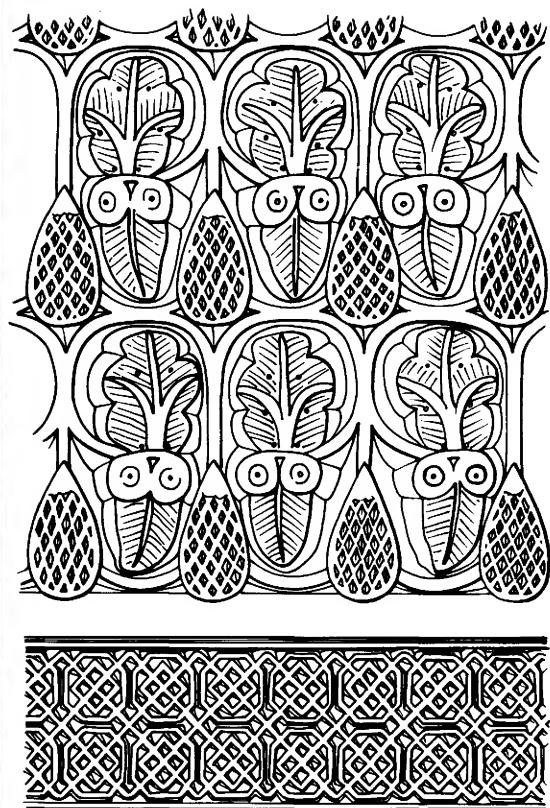
1.139

Fragments of a carved plaster inscription and border from C2. Traces of red paint on the letters, white on the outlines, blue in the recesses; border white with yellow-ocher framing bands. Top row second from left: height 22.5 cm, width 13.6 cm, depth 5.5 cm; center row second from left: height 27 cm, width 20.4 cm, depth 5.2 cm; The Metropolitan Museum of Art (40.170.678, 679)



1.140

Fragments of a carved plaster inscription and border from C2. Traces of red paint on the letters, white on the outlines, blue in the recesses; border white with yellow-ocher framing bands. Width of bottom border as assembled about 70 cm



1.141

Fragments of a carved plaster panel from C2. Height 65 cm. Drawing, at 1:5, by Lindsley F. Hall

separated from the red by a deep, cleanly cut groove. The lettering is very similar to that on the fragments of a fine Seljuq inscription from a madraseh constructed by the Nizam al-Mulk at Khargird in the eleventh century (the fragments are now in the Teheran museum; see Godard, "Khorasan," p. 80, fig. 61, and *Art de l'Iran*, p. 317, fig. 154). Like these, the verticals at Khargird have tripartite tops, but the foliage growing from the tops of the letters consists of flat, tuliplike flowers decorated only with simple drilled holes.

Deeply cut, curving slots decorated with small palmettes and curled leaves, some of them spiraling from the edges of the letters, fill the background in this inscription from Nishapur. The thick whorl punctuated by two round holes that is incorporated into the leafy patterns appears nowhere else in the carved plasterwork at Nishapur. Nor has it been found, so far as I know, anywhere to the west of Nishapur; this particular decorative element was not used, for example, in any of the carved plaster at Mashhad-i-Misriyan. The whorl does appear, however, as part of a border pattern in the nine-domed Abbasid mosque at Balkh, to the east. Lisa Golombek dates



1.142

Fragments of a carved plaster panel from C2 (see 1.143)

the work at Balkh to the ninth century, before 876 (Golombek, "Mosque at Balkh," fig. 16). This inscription from Tepe Madraseh, in a different style, is surely later.

The foliated patterns in the inscription bear no resemblance to either layer of plaster found in situ in the prayer hall, but the double row of octagons and crisscrossed squares on the fragments of border is precisely the same pattern used in the vertical borders on the later carving there (see Figure 1.125). The same border, as well as the small, perfectly shaped circle divided into quadrants that fills the loop on one of the surviving bits of lettering, reappears on fragments of decoration also found in area C2 (Figures 1.141–1.143).

The repetitive three-dimensional designs on these two groups of fragments from C2 are unlike any I have so far described, and they are obviously related. But as none of them was found in situ, how or whether they had been placed in relation to each other on a wall could not be determined. As the drawing Lindsley Hall made in the field shows, the fragments in Figure 1.141 came from the bottom of a panel of carving. The set in Figure 1.142

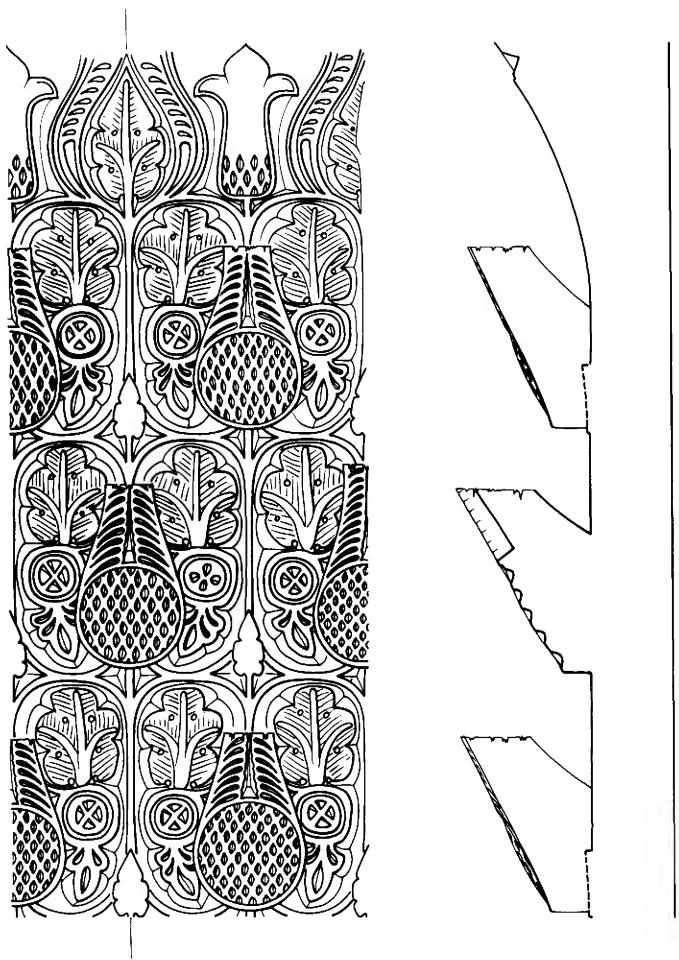


1.143

(right and opposite) Carved plaster panel reconstructed from the fragments in 1.142. Height 71.3 cm, width 74.5 cm, depth about 17.5 cm. Drawing, at 1:6, by Lindsley F. Hall. The Metropolitan Museum of Art (40.170.441)

once decorated the upper part of a wall, for the beginning of a cavetto cornice can be discerned when the pieces are fitted together (Figure 1.143).

The bold design in this work is created with rows of either round or pear-shaped forms, decorated with a deeply cut lattice pattern, that so project from the surface of the background as to look merely suspended there. Only three of the small oval forms survive on Figure 1.141, and even those are badly damaged. The larger, roughly circular projections on the cornice piece are surmounted by pairs of slotted half-leaves; though none is complete, there is little doubt that after narrowing near the top the tips of the leaves grew apart, perhaps with a small element between them. On either side of the projecting forms, a vine leaf with three raised veins and a small inverted palmette grow from either two eyelike pierced circles or a single, quartered one. Just below where the cornice begins, at the upper left of the assembled fragments, a metamorphosis occurs: the vine leaf becomes a palmette, complete with raised veins. Following an old custom, the palmette is enclosed between two curved half-palmettes with triangular slotting. This particular treatment is seen on the capitals of the columns in the mosque at



Balkh (Melikian-Chirvani, "Mosque at Balkh"; Golombek, "Mosque at Balkh," p. 181, fig. 17).

Cornices of carved plaster were by no means unusual in early Islamic architecture. One found by D. Talbot Rice at Hira in Iraq is an excellent example (Rice, "Excavations at Hira," fig. 14). On the Hira cornice, which Rice has assigned to the eighth century, the vine leaves have the triple raised veins. The forms between the leaves also project from the surface, but instead of being pierced they are made to look like pinecones. In the ninth-century examples discovered by Ernst Herzfeld in the Bab al-'Amma (Hall of Public Audience) of the Jausaq al-Khaqani palace at Samarra, the swelling forms are no longer the pinecones so prevalent in eighth-century Muslim art but have been pierced, like those from Tepe Madraseh, with a lattice of small, lozenge-shaped holes (Herzfeld, *Samarra* 1, pp. 199-200, figs. 283-85, reproduced in Creswell, *Early Muslim Architecture* 2, p. 237, fig. 186, pl. 52). The elaboration of the lattice into hexagons and other geometric shapes came still later, in the tenth century (see Pope, *Survey* 4, pl. 269b).

I have already suggested that the fragments of plaster in Figure 1.136

may be of the same period as the lower layer of carved plaster in the prayer hall and may have been tossed out when the hall was redecorated. The recurrence of the octagon-and-crisscross border from the second layer of decoration in the hall on the other fragments from C2 (Figures 1.139–1.141) raises the question whether all this carving is contemporary, which would mean that plaster decoration from two periods was discarded from the hall. In this scene of successive destruction and reconstruction, however, no sure statement of sequences can be made. We can be certain only that the work on the upper layer of plaster in situ in the prayer hall is later than the carving on the layer below it. The rest is but speculation, based mostly on parallels and resemblances to the decoration at other sites whose dates are by no means definite.

#### *The Northwest and Southwest Complexes*

Most of the carved plaster decoration excavated in the secular part of Tepe Madraseh was confined to a rather small area, the group of rooms forming a right angle around the south corner of the field within the mound (areas X and Y on the low level plan). Elsewhere in the rooms behind the facades we found but traces of the dadoes that once had adorned at least some of these structures. On the northwest side of the quadrangle of cultivation a scrap of carving remained in situ near the doorway on the northwest wall of S4 (Figure 1.144, and see 1.43). Rooms S5 and U5, nearby, yielded a few further fragments (Figure 1.145). And in 1947, the final year of the expedition, we turned up a handful of pieces in X15, in the unmapped area behind the center section of the southwest facade (Figure 1.146).

At the south corner of the mound carved plaster was found in place on the piers (P1–3), on the walls of the passageway behind them (X7), in the room across the passageway (X5), and in what remained of the rooms and

1.144

Carved plaster in situ to the right of the doorway on the northwest wall of S4 (see 1.43)





1.145

Fragments of carved plaster, top two from U5, others from a low level well in S5. Scale about 1:8



1.146

Fragments of carved plaster from X15. Scale about 1:9

corridors that were cleared on the southeast side of the square (Y1-3, Y7). All of the walls and piers in this area were badly damaged; none was complete even to the tops of the dadoes, let alone to its full height. Much of the damage had been caused by the application of a layer of smooth white plaster to surfaces that had undoubtedly already been partly eroded. In both style and design, this carving was quite different from that found in and near the prayer hall and can be immediately recognized as belonging to an earlier period. This is not to say that the prayer hall did not exist at the time this decoration was created, but only that no contemporary carved plaster survived the later reconstructions of the hall and the rooms around it.

The piers had been built in the earliest period of the complex, probably the ninth century. Later, with no great change in level, they were incorporated into the walls of buildings still of some importance but not decorated with carved plaster (see Figures 1.63, 1.64). Later still, these new structures were subdivided. The two piers we freed from the later khisht walls (P1-2) measured 1.8 by 1.6 meters. On its northwest face each had two engaged columns and a simple white dado 1.1 meters high above a footing of about 30 centimeters (Figures 1.147-1.152). The carved plaster that survived on the sides of the piers was 5 centimeters thick. No paint remained on these dadoes, but there is little doubt that color once enhanced the carving. The engaged columns had been painted red, and it is probable that the smooth



1.147

Northwest and northeast faces of the pier (P1) on the lowest level at the south corner of Tepe Madraseh, April 1940, when the later construction had been cleared away. Y1 is to the left, P2 to the right. The corridor (X7) runs behind P2 and P1

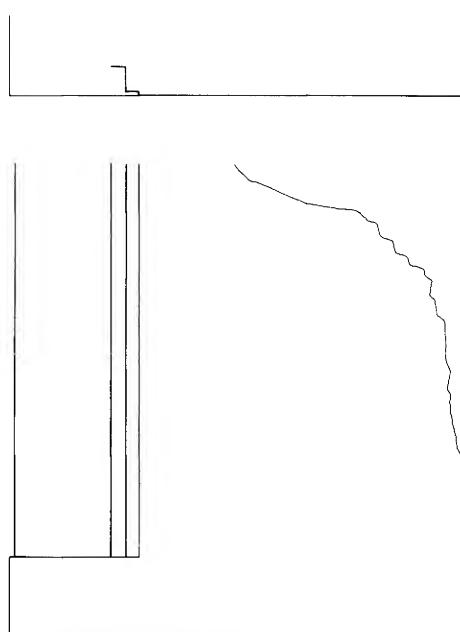
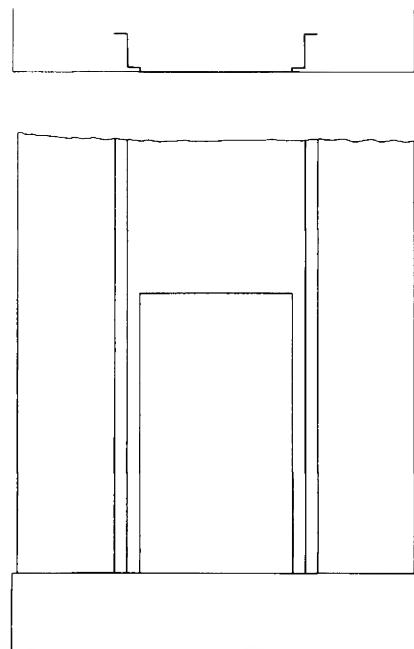
kahgil surface above the dadoes, whether they were plain or carved, had also been red. The corners behind the columns were white.

The geometric framework of the design—an interesting combination of circles and squares with an eight-pointed star at the center—could be made out on what was left of the dado on the southwest face of the pier labeled P1 on the low level plan (Figure 1.150). Only the lower part of the facing dado, on the northeast side of P2, survived, but the carving was in somewhat better condition (Figure 1.151). On the southwest face of P2 it was evident that the



1.148

Northwest and southwest faces of P1, looking east from X10, April 1940. Part of the dado on the southeast wall of X7 (see 1.155) shows behind the pier



1.149

Front (northwest side) and southwest face of P1. Elevation, profile, and plan, at 1:30, drawn by Lindsley F. Hall

1.150

Southwest face of P1, with X7 to the right and Y1 just beyond



1.151

Northeast face of P2, with x7 to the left and the doorway to x5 at the far left



1.152

x4 looking north over x5 and x7, April 1940. The southwest face of P2 is at the lower left; P1 is in the middle distance



smooth, undecorated plaster dado that covered the carved decoration at a later period had extended upward by several centimeters (Figure 1.152 lower left). We were able to remove this piece of carved plaster, with its pattern of interlaced circles, from the wall. Figure 1.153 shows the style and technique of the cutting much more clearly than do the photographs of any of the other carvings.

The panel of carving preserved on the northeast wall of a third pier (P3), at the southwest end of X7 (Figure 1.154), gives a better idea of the boldness of the designs, which varied from wall to wall. We may presume that the dadoes that were completely destroyed would also have reflected this love of variety. In this case a quatrefoil and four lozenges fill a square. Although this dado, too, had been obliterated by a superimposed layer of plaster, here the pricked surface survived, and this is also the only place where a suggestion of the horizontal border remained at the top of the decoration.

The fleur-de-lis motif in the central quatrefoil in this panel of carving also appears on the main frieze in the mosque of Ahmad ibn Tulun (835–884) in Cairo, which was begun in 876–77 and finished some two years later. The mosque, restored in the 1920s by Signor Patricolo, is discussed

1.154

Northeast face of the pier (P3) at the southwest end of the corridor (X7)



1.153

Carved plaster removed from the southwest face of P2 (see 1.152)





1.155

Southeast wall of x7

and illustrated in K. A. C. Creswell's splendid *Early Muslim Architecture* (2, pp. 332–56, pls. 96–114). Both the engaged columns and the actual style of the carving on these piers at Nishapur call to mind the Ibn Tulun mosque, where the piers and the decoration, all on a grander scale than in Tepe Madraseh (the piers in Cairo are 2.5 by 1.3 meters), reflect a strong influence from Mesopotamia. Later, in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, engaged columns and carved plaster decoration were used at Termez (Pugachenkova and Rempel, *Istoriya iskusstva Uzbekistana*, figs. 203, 204; Denike, *Arkhitekturnyi ornament*, pls. XX–XXIII). There, however, the columns were placed above the dadoes, and though the designs are intriguing in that they include lions, the actual carving is flatter and less sophisticated than the work at Tepe Madraseh.

The decoration in x7, the passageway behind the piers, had unfortunately suffered much damage, which the addition of a layer of white plaster did nothing to alleviate. A piece of carving still adhering to the southwest end of the southeast wall in x7 can be seen on the left in Figure 1.151. Enough remained on the section of wall behind p1 (Figure 1.155) to show that the principal design, a geometric pattern somewhat grander than those on the piers, is an octafoil flanked by intersecting arcs. To the right are several vertical columns filled with illegible repeated designs.

A doorway to the right of the panel in Figure 1.155 gave entrance to x5, a room that must once have been quite sumptuous (Figure 1.156). The walls of x5, which was at the edge of the excavated area and was never completely cleared, were covered with carved plaster dadoes contemporary with those on the red piers and in x7. Only the lower parts of the dadoes, mirror images of each other, on either side of the doorway in the northwest wall had

survived, and here too erosion had rendered some of the designs in the vertical bands illegible. More of the right panel had been preserved; a good part of the left was lost when a sinkaway was inserted from a higher level (Figures 1.157, 1.158). A ropelike twist, a simple pattern that makes an effective contrast to the rich treatment in the dadoes on the walls, framed the entrance. A modified and secondary form of this design appears on the head of the mihrab at the tenth-century *Masjid-i-Jami'* at Nayin (Hutt and Harrow, *Iran*, p. 65, pl. 9). Much later it was boldly used in blue-glazed tile on the exteriors of religious buildings such as the shrine of Khwaja Abu Nasr Parsa, built in Balkh in the fifteenth century (Pope, *Survey* 4, pls. 422, 424). The wider vertical band abutting the cordlike frame is filled with four circles



1.156  
x5 looking northwest, April 1940



1.157, 1.158  
Northwest wall of x5



1.159

Northeast wall of X5



1.160

Southwest wall of X5. The section of khisht wall at the center is a later addition



1.161

Southwest wall of Y1

enclosing vine leaves with holes drilled in the lobes. The leaves have been made to look like palmettes, and emerging from the bottom of each of them are two forms resembling cornucopias that curl upward to meet above the top of the leaf. A similar decorative device fills the circles in the carving from pier P2 (see Figure 1.153), although the "cornucopias" in X5 were simpler and decorated merely with pricking. (The Iranian craftsman who carved them was evidently not above cutting corners.) Basically the same motif is seen on the dado in the great iwan of the Bab al-'Amma in the Jausaq al-Khaqani palace at Samarra (recorded by Ernst Herzfeld and illustrated in Creswell, *Early Muslim Architecture* 2, pl. 52a, d). The contiguous bands on



1.162

(above) Fragments of carved plaster found in the doorway in the north-east wall of Y2. Height about 37 cm, width about 35 cm



1.163

(left) Fragment of carved plaster found on the low level of Y3. Height about 24 cm, width about 62 cm

these dadoes in X5 are similar to those on the panel in X7, on the opposite face of the same wall (Figure 1.155, where a version of the palmette-and-cornucopia motif also appears, but in very poor condition). At least two of the bands at the corners contain a simple repetitive device: a rosette with seven drilled holes. In the bottom right-hand corner of the wall (Figure 1.158), there seems to have been a change in the design. The original pattern contained the arc of a circle larger than those in the band to the left.

The larger circle is perhaps more in keeping with the design on the northeast wall: four large circles enclosed in a square panel with a quatrefoil at its center (Figure 1.159). This wall was in better condition; most of the details and the layout of the designs can still be made out. Here the seven holes drilled in alternating disks in the borders are clearly discernible, as they are in the sections of carving preserved on the southwest wall (Figure 1.160). The surface decoration on many of the other motifs can only be imagined, but that they were left without at least a pricked surface is unlikely.

Although all that remained of the decoration in Y1, the room to the northeast of X5, was a narrow strip of dado along the lower part of the southwest wall, the detail on the carving was sharper (Figure 1.161). The strength and excellence of the plasterwork in this complex of rooms can best be seen, however, on the few pieces that escaped severe damage from either



1.164

Carved plaster in situ on the southwest wall on the lowest level of Y7

erosion or superimposed plaster. One of these had been miraculously preserved in the doorway in the northeast wall of room Y2 (Figure 1.162). Another, with a type of acanthus leaf filling the triangle formed by the insertion of a hexagon into a rectangular frame, was discovered half a meter below the general plaster level in room Y3 (Figure 1.163). A third fragment, found at a deep level on the southwest wall of Y7, is carved in a style unmatched anywhere else in the excavations (Figure 1.164). The serrations on the circles in the distinctive border pattern on what remains of two lozenges appear to be unique, adding an inventive touch to a conventional design. Between the lozenges a vine leaf grows from a pomegranate supported by two curling half-palmettes pierced by triangular holes. No carved plaster decoration found in Tepe Madraseh can be considered earlier than this piece. Only the carved plaster at Hira bears any general resemblance to Figure 1.164, and D. Talbot Rice has ascribed that to the eighth century (Rice, "Excavations at Hira," fig. 13).

*Cornices and Window Frames from  
Throughout the Nishapur Ruin Field*

No wall in any building excavated at Nishapur remained intact to its full height, nor was there any indication of what the ceilings had been composed of or how they had been constructed. Although no burned timbers like those found in the excavations at Khirbat al-Mafjar, in what is now Jordan, had been preserved in the Nishapur ruins, it is not impossible that the ceilings were similarly constructed, using a technique still employed in the twentieth century: across the width of the room the slender trunks of poplar trees (assuming that poplars grew in Khurasan several centuries ago) were laid, and across these rafters palm-leaf matting was spread. Whether or not there were plastered ceilings must remain a question.

We did, however, find fragments of string courses, most of them presumably used as cornices, and of window frames that gave some idea of how the tops of the walls and the windows had been decorated. For convenience and to simplify comparison, the cornices and frames retrieved not only from Tepe Madraseh but from Sabz Pushan, the Vineyard Tepe, and other parts of the ruin field are described in this section. All of the pieces were found in buildings of a secular nature; none was found in the prayer hall at Tepe Madraseh or in the rooms around it.

In the small sondage known as the Wart we discovered a fragment of a true cornice, of carved and painted plaster (Figure 1.165, Plate 2), on which the decoration bore some resemblance to carved plaster found at the Vineyard Tepe (see Figures 2.16, 2.18, 2.24, 2.28–2.31).



1.165

Fragment of a cornice from the Wart (see Plate 2). Carved and painted plaster. Height 16 cm. The Metropolitan Museum of Art (40.170.267)

Hard white plaster, or stucco, made from gypsum and of finer quality than the softer medium used for carved plaster decoration was used to fashion the Nishapur string courses, most of which were made in molds. That gypsum was used in Nishapur comes as no surprise, for we know from Ibn Hauqal, who lived in the tenth century, that a place near Nishapur named Qa'in produced gypsum of such excellent quality that it was sent to all parts of Iran (Wulff, *Crafts of Persia*, p. 126).

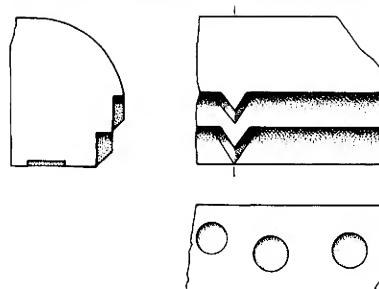
Several of these pieces are clearly cornices, made to project slightly from the top of the wall just below the ceiling. As the two fragments in Figure 1.166 illustrate, the condition of the pieces ranged from very bad to almost pristine. The poorly preserved fragment on the left, from room w15 in Tepe Madraseh, has a pattern of outlined circles flanked by horizontal "teardrops." The other piece, from room w5 of the same tepe, is in excellent condition. The fragment, part of a projecting cornice with circular holes bored in its underside, has two small triangles in relief, one above the other.

Another narrow strip, the precise provenance of which is unknown, is decorated with raised dots and oblongs (Figure 1.167 center). On all of the other string courses the repetitive designs are based on one simple geometric



1.166

Fragments of string courses, left from w15, right from w5. Plaster. Right: width about 5 cm, depth about 4.6 cm; drawing, at 1:4, by Charles K. Wilkinson



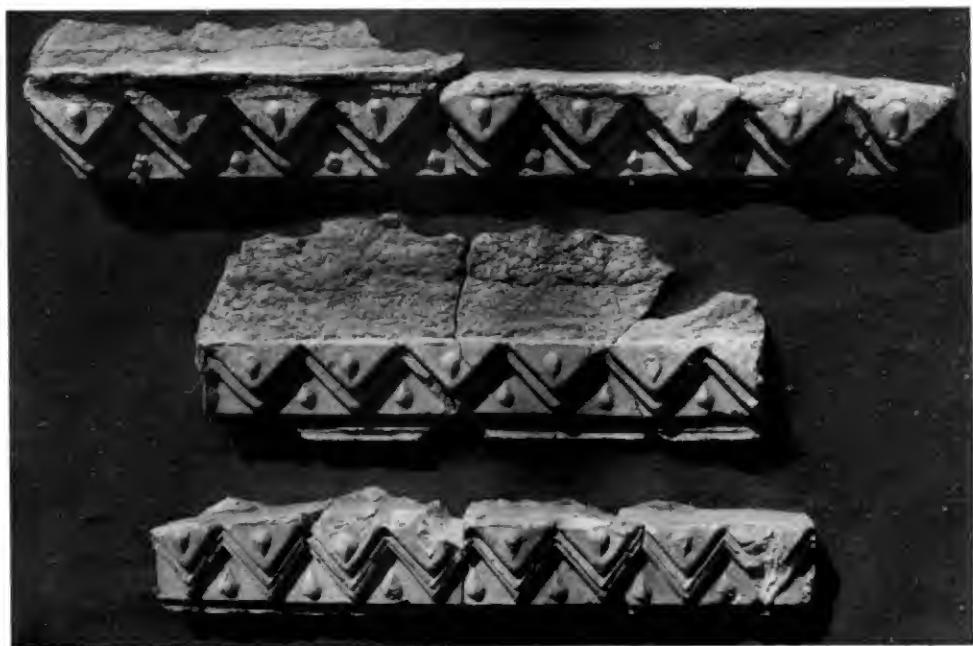
1.167

Frags of string courses, bottom row from the Village Tepe, top two from Nishapur, exact provenance unknown. Molded plaster. Center: height 21 cm, width 29.3 cm, depth 4.6 cm; The Metropolitan Museum of Art (40.170.676)



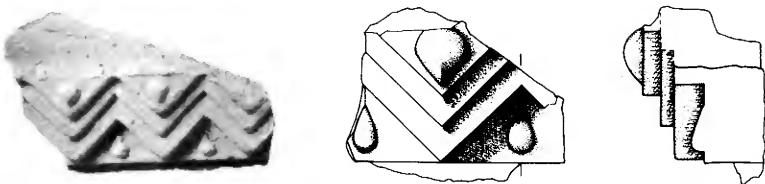
1.168

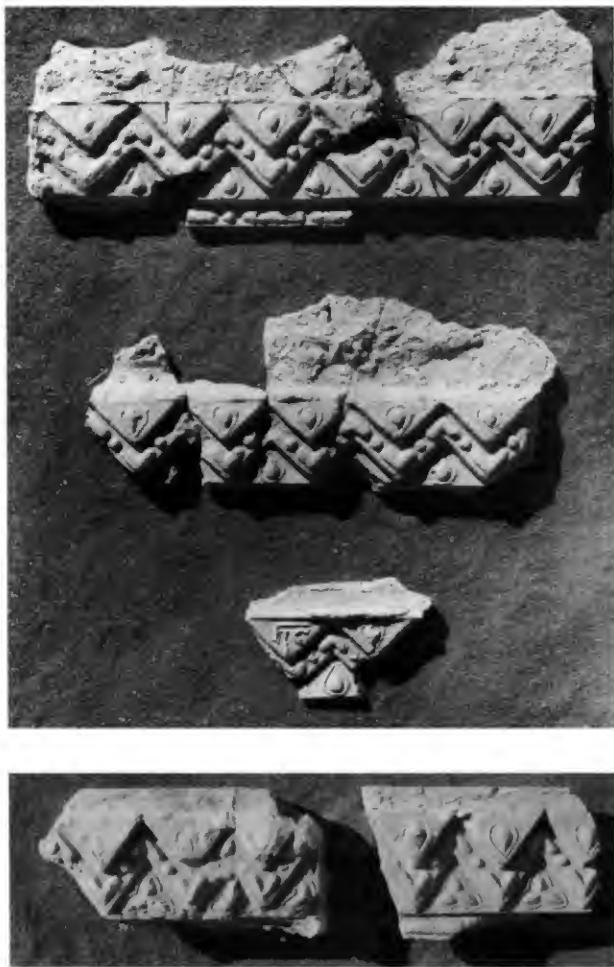
Frags of string courses, top from a zir-i-zamin (5D) in Sabz Pushan, others from the Village Tepe. Molded plaster. Top: width 95 cm



1.169

Frags of a string course found near Tepe Alp Arslan. Molded white plaster weathered pink. Height 21.6 cm, width 9.2 cm. The Metropolitan Museum of Art (38.20.12). Drawing of a similar fragment, at 1:4, by Walter Hauser



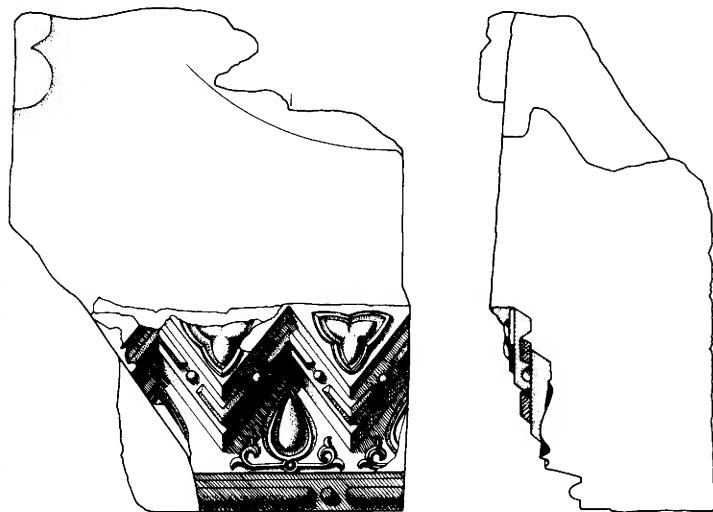


1.170

(left) Fragments of string courses from the Vineyard Tepe, V12. Molded plaster. Bottom (without lower triangle): height 9.9 cm, width 17.5 cm, depth 3.4 cm; The Metropolitan Museum of Art (40.170.677)

1.171

(below left) Fragments of string courses found near Tepe Madraseh. Molded plaster. Right: height about 13 cm, width about 19.5 cm



shape: the triangle. One piece from the Village Tepe has a single row of raised triangles, two others have a triple tier (Figures 1.167 bottom, 1.168 bottom), as did a fragment found near Tepe Alp Arslan (Figure 1.169). The others all have two rows of overlapping triangles arranged in a continuous line (Figures 1.167 top, 1.168 top two, 1.170–1.172). On those with a double tier the zigzag band formed by the projection of the lower triangles is on occasion left plain, but more commonly it is filled with raised dots and Vs. Beneath the broad bands of triangles the design is often completed by a narrow horizontal band decorated with a series of raised dots and dashes.

Such decorative elements were not unique to Nishapur. Less well-preserved fragments of cornices, some also decorated with raised triangles, were found at Rayy by an expedition led by Eric Schmidt for the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago in the early 1930s. (Photographs of these fragments exist in the unpublished study books of the Rayy material at the Oriental Institute; see especially photograph no. PID 52 QA. I thank Deborah Thompson for this and other Rayy references.)



1.172

(above) Fragment of a string course from Tepe Alp Arslan. Molded gritty white plaster weathered pink, on baked brick backing. Height 16.5 cm, width 18.1 cm. The Metropolitan Museum of Art (36.20.11). Drawing, at 1:4, by Walter Hauser

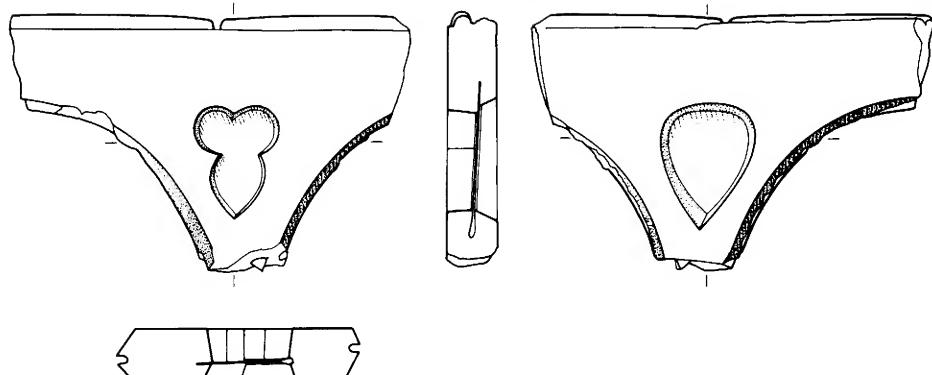
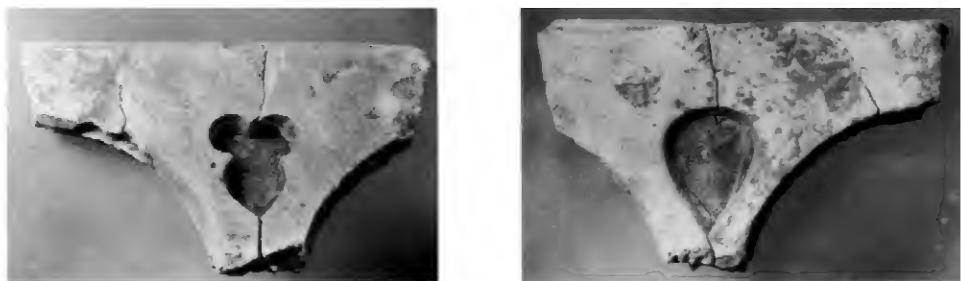


1.173

(above) Plaster lantern from the Vineyard Tepe, VI4. Height about 14.5 cm. Muzé Iran Bastan, Teheran

1.174

(right) Two sides of a fragment of a window frame from Tepe Madraseh, X5. Plaster with a greenish white glass pane. Height 12 cm, width 21 cm. Drawing, at 1:4, by Lindsley F. Hall



especially on mortars (Barrett, *Islamic Metalwork*, pl. 2B). As fillers in the triangular spaces on these string courses the teardrops are very effective.

In one instance the name 'Ali has been substituted for the ubiquitous teardrop (Figure 1.170 bottom). This could be an invocation of 'Ali, the cousin of the Prophet, who was caliph from 656 to 661, but it is more than possible that the artisan slipped his own name in among the teardrops. By accident or by design the name is in mirror writing, proof that molds were employed in the manufacture of these cornices. An accident is more likely, for potters did make such mistakes when fashioning molds. The potter who made one such mold excavated at Nishapur apparently realized his error and broke his mold after it had been fired (Wilkinson, *Nishapur: Pottery*, p. 275, no. 68).

Examples of a more elaborate filling for the triangles, variations on a trefoil, are to be seen in Figures 1.167 (top) and 1.172. A piece of a string

course from a sondage at Tepe Alp Arslan has trefoils in the top row of triangles (Figure 1.172). The teardrop in the lower register appears to grow like a cypress from delicate horizontal foliation, perfectly fitting the triangular space.

The same teardrop motif appears on a plaster lantern found in room V14 in the Vineyard that is now in Teheran (Figure 1.173). The lantern originally had circular glass lights on three sides and a square aperture on the fourth; a candle or a small oil lamp set inside would have provided illumination.

Some of the rooms at Nishapur had been enhanced by windows that filtered the daylight through colored glass set in plaster frames much like the lantern's. Although only a few fragments of these windows survived, and none was found in situ, they nonetheless add to our knowledge of the lives of the people who inhabited these buildings. From X5 in the secular part of Tepe Madraseh, the room whose walls were adorned with magnificent carved plaster dadoes (see Figures 1.156–1.160), came the only fragment with a sizable piece of glass still intact in its double plaster setting (Figure 1.174). On one side the small glass inset is in the shape of an inverted teardrop, on the other, a trefoil, and there are grooves for larger insets along the edges of the fragment. The glass itself has a greenish tinge and was made with a thickened rim such as is seen on large platters of blown glass like one found on a high level gatch floor in room Y6 (Figure 1.175). These windows were evidently meant only to let light in, and not to allow those within to observe the world outside. That the use of glass windows was nothing new



1.175

Platter from a well on a high level of Tepe Madrasch, Y6. Clear greenish blown glass. Height 4.5 cm, diameter 40 cm. The Metropolitan Museum of Art (40.170.137)



1.176

Fragments of window frames from Tepe Madraseh, W4 (see 1.177). Molded plaster. Top: width about 35 cm. Bottom: width about 19.5 cm; Muzé Iran Bastan, Teheran (similar to a piece found near the tomb of Omar Khayyam and now in The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 40.170.659)

by the ninth century is clear from the excavations of the palace at Khirbat al-Mafjar, where geometric or floral designs had sometimes even been drawn on the glass in black paint (Baramki, "Khirbet el Mefjer," p. 158, pl. XXXIV,5). Windows, better described as pierced lights, are a feature in the vault of the south aisle in the monastery of Anbar Beshoi in the Wadi Natrun in Egypt, which dates to the tenth century (Evelyn White, *Wâdi 'n Natrûn*, pl. XLVIIID).

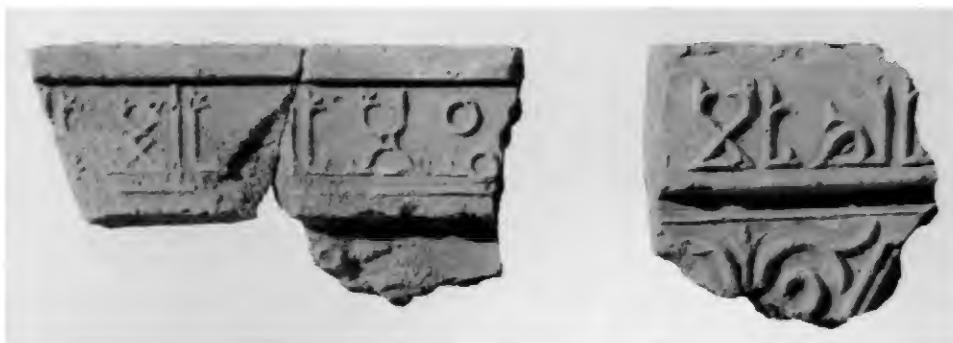
The window frames vary considerably in style. Some of them have strictly geometric designs, but the most interesting plaster-framed lights from Nishapur have a thick horizontal band at the top (once perhaps all around them) decorated by raised patterns or inscriptions, usually foliated Kufic. In one instance, on a piece from room W4 in Tepe Madraseh, the spaces between the vertical letters of the Kufic inscription are filled with curling stems ending in flowerets (Figure 1.176 top). Unfortunately, except for the initial unscathed *al-hamd* (praise), the inscription is too damaged to be read. Figure 1.177 shows this piece partially restored. From what has survived only the shape of the cusps at the top of the window opening can be determined. The spaces between the cusps are filled with an elegant floral design. Part of a line of tall simple floriated Kufic was preserved on two pieces found near Tepe Madraseh, but they are too fragmentary to indicate the shape of any of the glass insets (Figure 1.178).



1.177

Fragment of a window frame from Tepe Madraseh, W4 (see 1.176 top). Partially restored. Molded plaster. Height 12.8 cm, width 23 cm, depth 2.5 cm. The Metropolitan Museum of Art (40.170.658)

In striking contrast to the plaster frames with Kufic lettering is a fragment of what may or may not be part of a window frame from the Village Tepe (Figure 1.179). The style of this piece, with its band of flowing Naskhi script decorated with curling stems bearing leaflike forms and flowers, is



1.178

Fragments of window frames found near Tepe Madraseh. Molded plaster. Right: height 11 cm, width 14 cm, depth 3 cm; The Metropolitan Museum of Art (40.170.657)

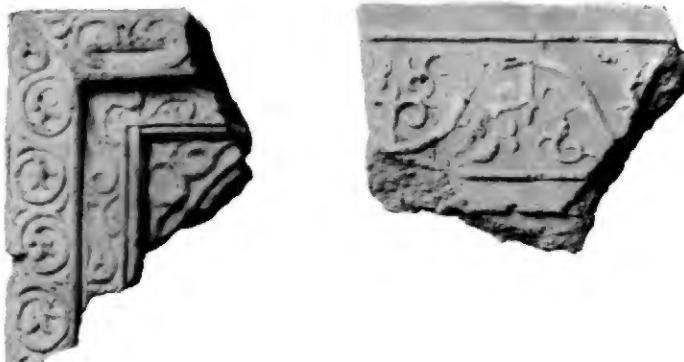


1.179

Fragment of framing from the Village Tepe. Molded plaster with traces of red and blue paint. Height about 16 cm, width about 26 cm

## 1.180

(right) Fragments of window frames from the Qanat Tepe, 1A4. Molded plaster. Left: height 15 cm, width 10.5 cm, depth 3.7 cm; The Metropolitan Museum of Art (40.170.656). Right: height about 10 cm, width about 13 cm; Muzé Iran Bastan, Teheran



## 1.181

(below) Fragment of a window frame from a zir-i-zamin (4G) in Sabz Pushan. Molded plaster. Height about 19 cm, width about 15 cm

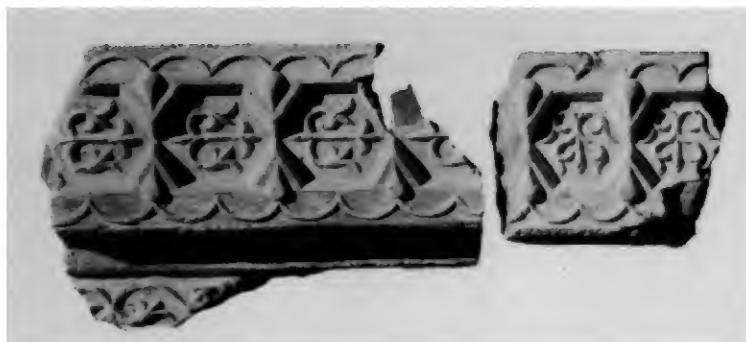


## 1.182

(right) Fragments of window frames from the Village Tepe. Molded plaster over a terracotta core. Left: height about 12 cm, width about 18 cm; Muzé Iran Bastan, Teheran. Right: height 8.2 cm, width 9.5 cm, depth 4 cm; The Metropolitan Museum of Art (40.170.660)

completely different from that of any of the other cornices and frames. It recalls some similar pieces, again in very poor condition, that were found at Rayy (unpublished study books of Rayy material, Oriental Institute, University of Chicago, photograph nos. 119 132 126, 116 133). Above the inscription on the Village fragment is a narrower band decorated with two undulating, intertwined stems with leaves. A narrow band of linked quatrefoils under the lettering completes the design on the heavy upper frame, which projects slightly from the thinner plaster beneath it. Very little is left of the ornament on the thinner frame below the cornice, and there is no indication of its original shape. The traces of blue and red still remaining on this fragment suggest that color may have been used on the other frames.

Three other pieces of plaster framing are decorated with conven-



tionalized leafy forms molded in relief but have no lettering. Two of them, from the Qanat Tepe, are so incomplete their function is not altogether clear (Figure 1.180). The third, from a zir-i-zamin in Sabz Pushan, at least shows that the inset was cusped (Figure 1.181). On an exceptional piece from the Village Tepe the deep hexagonal walls framing what might be termed foliated tridents are the main feature (Figure 1.182). Only two fragments of this frame were retrieved, but they are sufficient to indicate that the whole frame was rectangular: not only do the tridents face different directions on

the two pieces, but the design has been changed slightly, though it is still in keeping with the pattern's overall unity of spirit. The design on the one morsel of thin plaster beneath the molding is freely drawn. In spirit and appearance the molded decoration within the sunken hexagons is very similar indeed to that on some gilded bronze ornaments found in the excavations (Figure 1.183).

Some plaster framing retrieved from room Y8, on the southern tip of the mound between the cultivated quadrangle within and the general cultivation without, is of more than passing interest (Figure 1.184). The room was not large (4 meters by less than 3) and had a well in it; excavation was not possible to determine if there was any connection between it and the octagonal ab-anbar (Y10) found nearby. The decoration on the framing includes no lettering, but the continual repetition of crosses at regular intervals suggests in the strongest way that the room it adorned was used by Christians. Although crosses were also used in Islamic decoration, in this instance there is every reason to believe that these truly were Christian symbols that had been purposely incorporated into the general scheme of the designs. That Christians were living in Nishapur from the ninth to the twelfth century is indubitable, not only from literary sources but from a number of unmistakably Christian artifacts discovered by the Metropolitan Museum expedition as well as by other, less controlled excavations: glazed pottery inkwells, circular dishes for condiments, and bowls and suchlike (see Figure 3.17), as



1.183

Harness ornament from the middle level of Tepe Madraseh, area T. Cast, gilded bronze. Height 3.6 cm, width 2.7 cm. The Metropolitan Museum of Art (40.170.253). See Allan, *Nishapur: Metalwork*, p. 92, no. 133



1.184

Fragments of a window frame from Tepe Madraseh, Y8. Molded plaster. Scale about 3:10. Top left piece is in the Muzé Iran Bastan, Teheran; the others are in The Metropolitan Museum of Art (40.170.661)



1.185

Latrine on a high level of w2 in Tepe Madrasah, looking east, September 18, 1939. The area to the right has been cleared to the next level

well as an earthenware plaque. Most of these were locally made, but a bowl with a Syriac inscription could conceivably have been an import (see Wilkinson, "Christian Remains from Nishapur," figs. 1-10, and *Nishapur: Pottery*, p. xli). Nothing else about these fragments is particularly remarkable. The plaster surface below the thick molding is decorated with intertwining stems and flowers that once framed either cusped or circular openings.

#### *The Round Painted Room in the Southwest Complex*

On the lowest level of the complex of buildings on the southwest side of the intrusive square of cultivation, we discovered a small circular room (w2), 4 meters in diameter, the decoration of which proved to be unique in both technique and style. The walls of the room, which had once been domed, were entirely covered with a lattice of molded plaster painted in brilliant colors. Although the cupola had disappeared, the original circular wall with its decoration was remarkably well preserved, considering the many changes the room had undergone over the centuries. First, the floor level was raised somewhat and the decoration was obliterated by several coats of hard white plaster. Some time later, the level was raised again, and the floor was pierced by a circular well. Eventually, at a still later period, when the room was no longer round, it contained a white plaster latrine with a small square table for the necessary jug of water (Figure 1.185).



1.186

w2 looking northeast, November 1, 1939. The ring of the lowest gatch floor shows clearly on the wall

The original room (Figure 1.186), at a level of 94.46 meters, had but one entryway, on the southeast side, where it adjoined an L-shaped room designated w1 and w8 on the plan. On the northeast side was a false doorway executed in relief in plaster to simulate a double door made from six vertical planks, with an overlapping guard strip where it "opened" at the center (Figure 1.187). After a while a second entryway was added, directly



1.187

False doorway on the northeast side of w2

across the room from the false door. Why there should have been an imitation door is a problem indeed. A false door, so necessary in ancient Egyptian tomb chapels for the convenience of the *ka*, or double, of the departed, fills no corresponding need in Islamic decoration. This room was solely for the enjoyment of the living.

The latticework design of the decoration was a continuation of the Sasanian tradition that immediately preceded the introduction of Islam in the seventh century. The red lattice, in high relief, the crossings marked by simulated nailheads painted a greenish color and backed by rosette-shaped red washers, framed a network of lozenges containing eight-petaled rosettes in low relief (Figure 1.188). The rosettes were white; the quatrefoils surrounding them were red edged in white on a blue ground. All this was achieved in molds with nothing more than mud mixed with finely chopped straw as a binder and then covered with thick opaque paint, a fine example of the rich effects the Nishapur artists were capable of creating using only the simplest materials. With its domed ceiling and its colorful decoration, the little room must have been very striking.



1.188

Detail of the molded decoration on the northeast side of w2. Mud mixed with straw; latticework painted red with greenish "nailheads," rosettes white, and quatrefoils red with white outlines on a blue ground, all over a coat of thin white underpainting. Width of top lozenge about 16 cm

## WALL PAINTING

Very little evidence of wall painting was found in and around the prayer hall, but, as I have said, the devastation in the area was so great that it was impossible to say to what extent either the prayer hall itself or the structures built against its massive walls had been decorated, either with carved and painted plaster or with colored decoration painted directly on the flat wall surfaces. Inside the hall, on a high level, we found fragments of plaster that indicated there had been painting in the prayer hall in the twelfth century, the last century in which there was evidence of building. And a small piece of wall painting was actually found *in situ* in H4, one of the rooms abutting the hall's southwest side.

Across the square from the prayer hall we were able to excavate to very low levels in some places, and we were rewarded by the discovery of extraordinary paintings, dating perhaps to the earliest period of habitation at the site, that had been miraculously preserved over the centuries beneath several levels of floors. In the northwest complex some painting on the doorjambs in room S11 had survived under piles of rubble. But it was in the complex of structures on the southwest side of the square of agriculture that the most intriguing painting was discovered—in room W20, not far from the small round painted room (W2) described in the last section. There is every reason to believe that the decoration in all three of these rooms—S11, W2, and W20—was contemporary, and that it was done no later than the tenth century.

*The Prayer Hall and Environs*

From the detritus at a high level in the prayer hall, along with the carved plaster fragments with stylized designs that could not have dated to earlier than the twelfth century (see Figures 1.119–1.122), we recovered a few pieces of painted plaster. Two of the fragments are thick chunks either from the edge of a doorway or, though the style suggests otherwise, from a mihrab of which no trace remained (Figures 1.189, 1.190). The designs on the fragments are outlined in black and painted blue and white with occasional touches of red.

The other painting, on very thin plaster indeed, is of more interest. Though the pieces are disappointingly scanty, they are sufficient to indicate that an inscription of considerable size was part of the decoration of one of the walls of the hall (Figures 1.191–1.193). It is not possible to tell whether the inscription, with its leafy background, was a frieze placed high on the wall just below the spring of the vault, as is the case in the tomb of Arslan



1.189

(above) Fragment of edging from a high level in the prayer hall. Painted plaster on mud; pattern blue on white with a touch of red at the center and black outlines. Height 17.8 cm, width 10.7 cm, depth 5.6 cm. The Metropolitan Museum of Art (40.170.668)

1.190

(below) Fragments of edging from a high level in the prayer hall. Painted plaster on mud; pattern blue and white with black outlines. Height about 26 cm, width about 9.5 cm



1.191

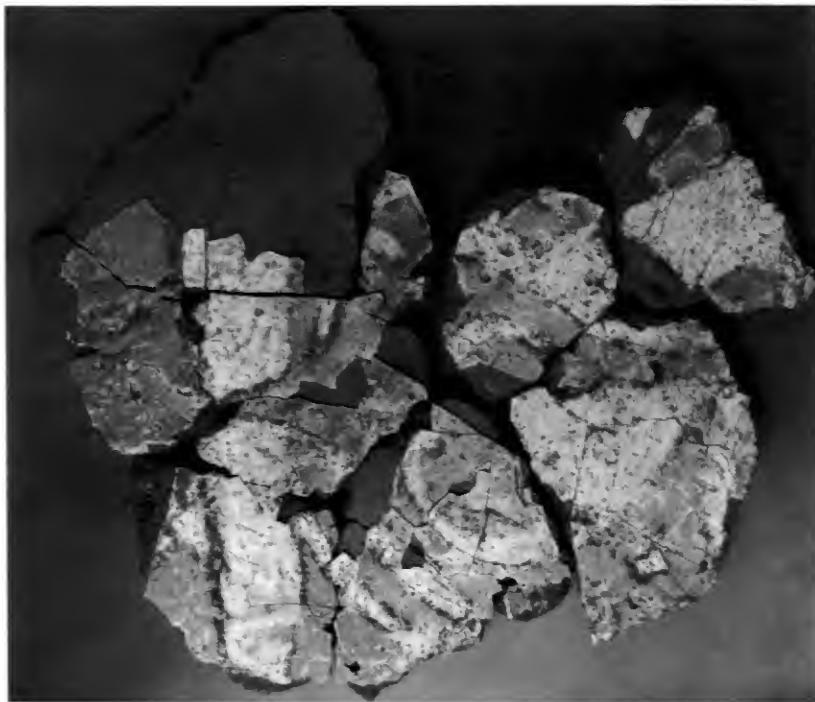
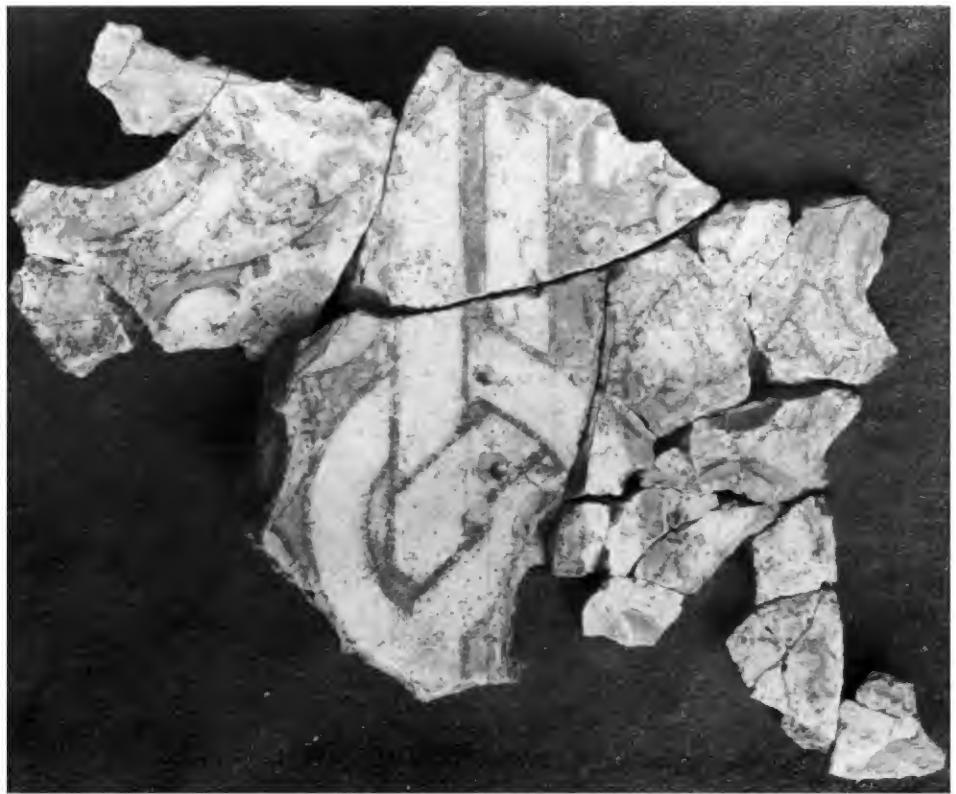
Fragments of an inscription from a high level in the prayer hall. Painted plaster; white lettering outlined in red, yellow foliate designs outlined in black and sometimes red, all on a blue ground. Height as assembled about 54.5 cm

1.192

(below left) Fragments of an inscription from a high level in the prayer hall. Painted plaster with white decoration outlined in red on a blue ground. Height as assembled about 30 cm

1.193

(below right) Fragments of an inscription from a high level in the prayer hall. Painted plaster with white decoration outlined in red on a blue ground. Height as assembled about 26.5 cm



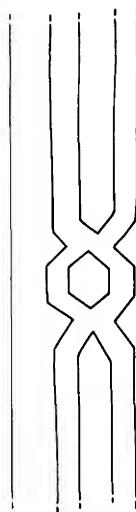
Jadhib at Sangbast (Diez, *Churasanische Baudenkmäler*, pl. IX). The tomb at Sangbast dates to about 1028; the style of writing on this fragment from Tepe Madraseh is a standard type that can be reasonably thought to be later. Plaited Kufic like this was found in the minaret of Jam, which was built between 1153 and 1203 (Maricq and Wiet, *Minaret de Djam*, pl. VII). The freely flowing but highly stylized leafy scrolls in the background of the Nishapur lettering recall some of the inscriptions on the ceiling of the Governor's Palace at Termez, attributed to the twelfth century by G. A. Pugachenkova (*Termez, Shakhrisyabz, Khiva*, p. 23, fig. 10). In the palace at Termez the carved plaster is divided with geometric strapwork enclosing rosettes and other designs similar to those we found at Nishapur.

The border pattern shown in Figure 1.194, a drawing of another fragment of painting found in the corner on the high level floor in the prayer hall, also appeared on the painted kahgil above the carved plaster panel that led to the excavation of Sabz Pushan (see Figure 3.20). The series of long blue links joined by hexagons is a common edging. It is featured on an inscription at Rabat-i Malik, a caravanserai in Uzbekistan that dates to the second half of the eleventh century, although there the lettering differs in character (Pope, "Architectural Ornament," p. 1279, fig. 461).

The fragment of painting found in H4, behind the prayer hall, was not photographed, but a color tracing of the drawing made at the site is reproduced in Plate 3. The patterns were painted on the northwest and northeast walls above a dado 62.5 centimeters high that projected a centimeter from the surface of the wall. The design, based on alternating red and white squares framed in the contrasting color, the white squares containing blue-and-white rosettes outlined in black, is strikingly similar to one found in room V16 of the Vineyard Tepe (see Plate 4). We found no clues in H4 to enable us to determine what purpose the room had served.

### *The Northwest and Southwest Complexes*

In S11, which had access to S4, the large hall that opened out into the facade of piers on the northwest side of the open square of cultivation (see low level plan), we discovered much more substantial evidence of painted wall decoration. One corner of S11, a room approximately 5 meters square with khisht walls almost 2 meters thick in all but one place, adjoined an oblong room (R4) furnished with two alcoves flanked by engaged columns reminiscent of those on the piers at the south corner of the mound (see Figures 1.147–1.152). As can be seen in the plans of the middle and upper levels, the area around S11 and R4 was changed completely at later dates, so much so that the rooms bore no relation to the original plan. Before that happened, however, the decoration in S11 had been in place for some time, for the painted



1.194

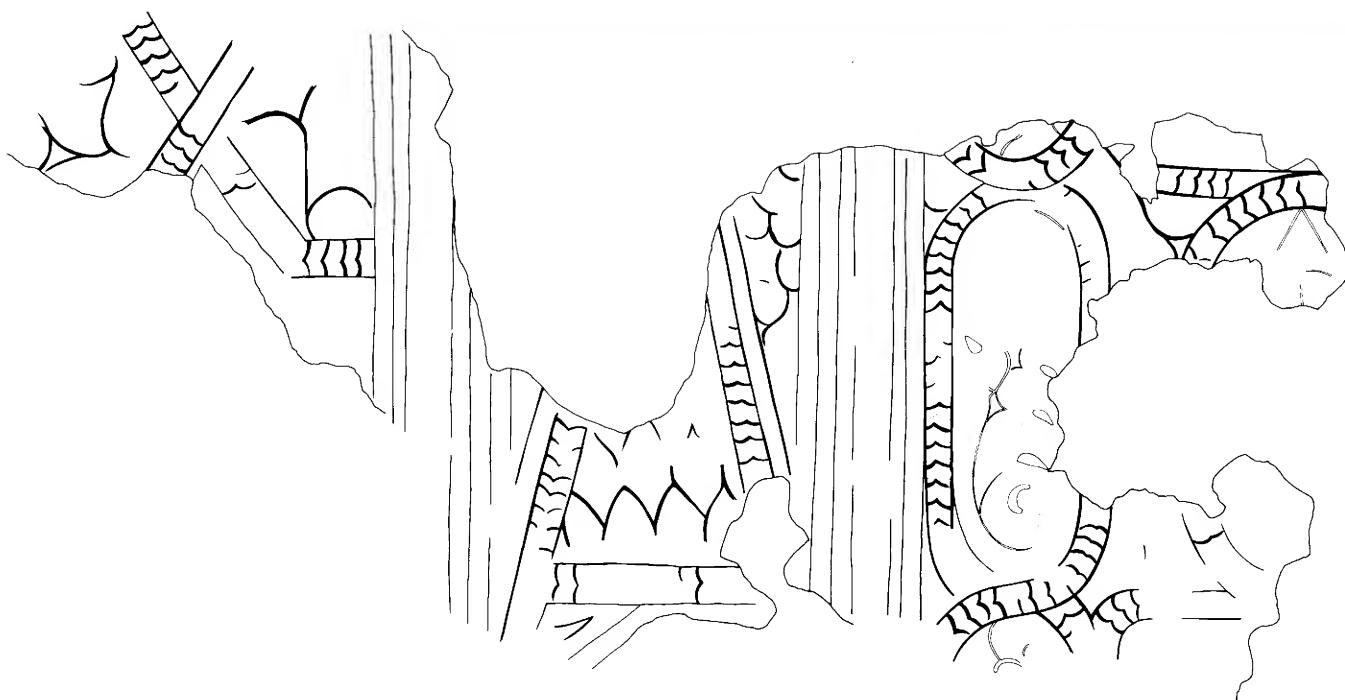
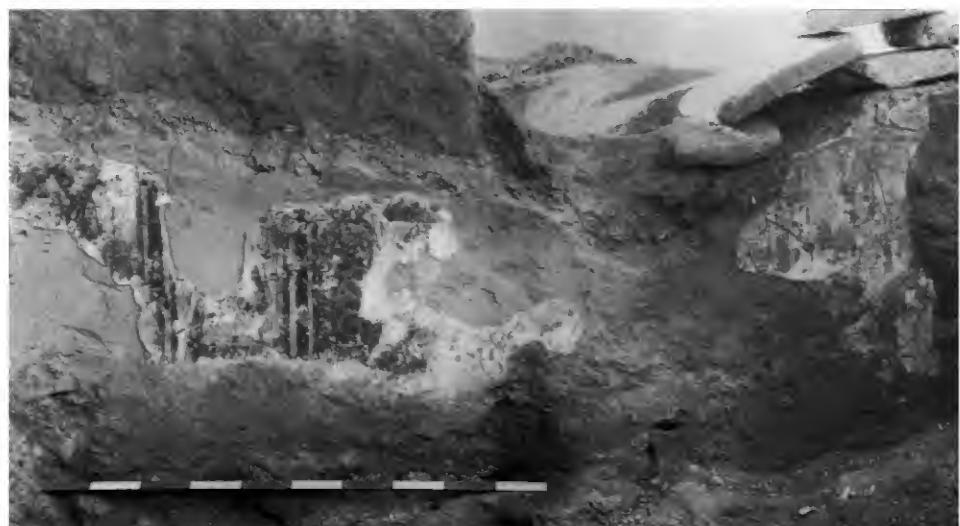
Sketch of a border pattern on a fragment of painted plaster from a high level in the prayer hall. Blue on white with touches of a red outline. Width about 8 cm

walls were covered with many coats of white plaster. Both the coats of plaster and the rebuilding had greatly damaged the dado, but not to the point of total destruction.

Two irregular fragments of painting in very poor condition remained in situ on the northwest side of S11 (Figure 1.195). From what survived it would appear that the wall painting was divided into upright oblong and square panels. The panels of painting on the jambs of the doorway leading into S12 (which was later blocked) were somewhat better preserved (Figures 1.196, 1.197). They existed in parts to their full height, despite lacunae and

1.195

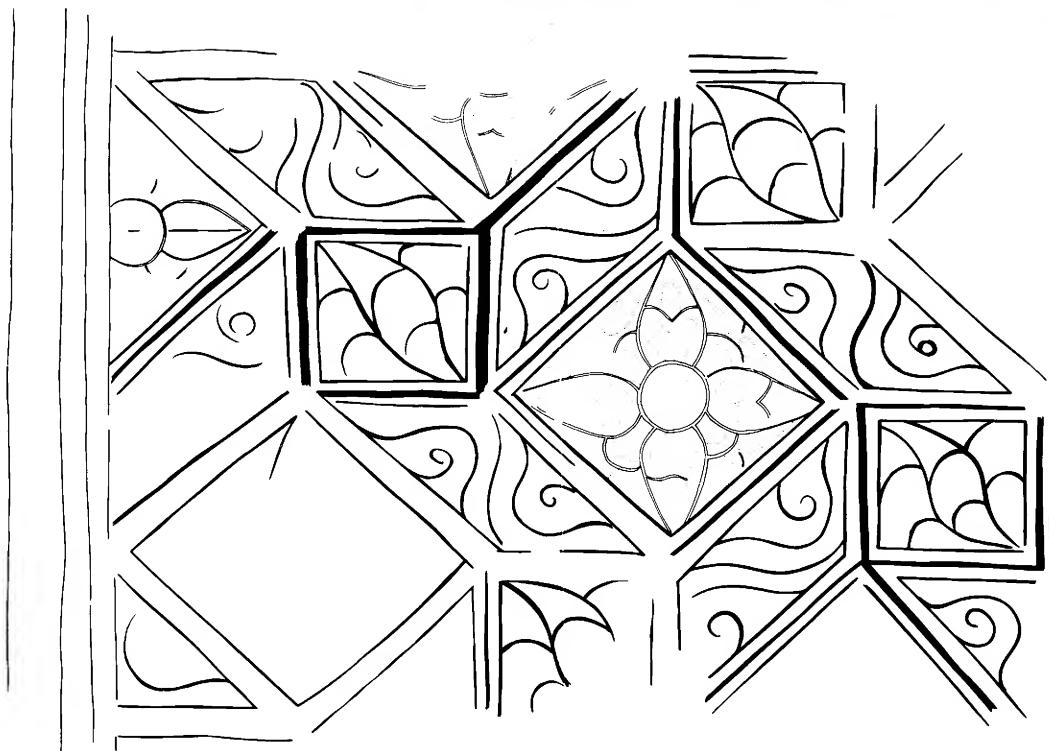
Fragments of painting on the northwest wall of S11. Drawing by William Schenck





1.196

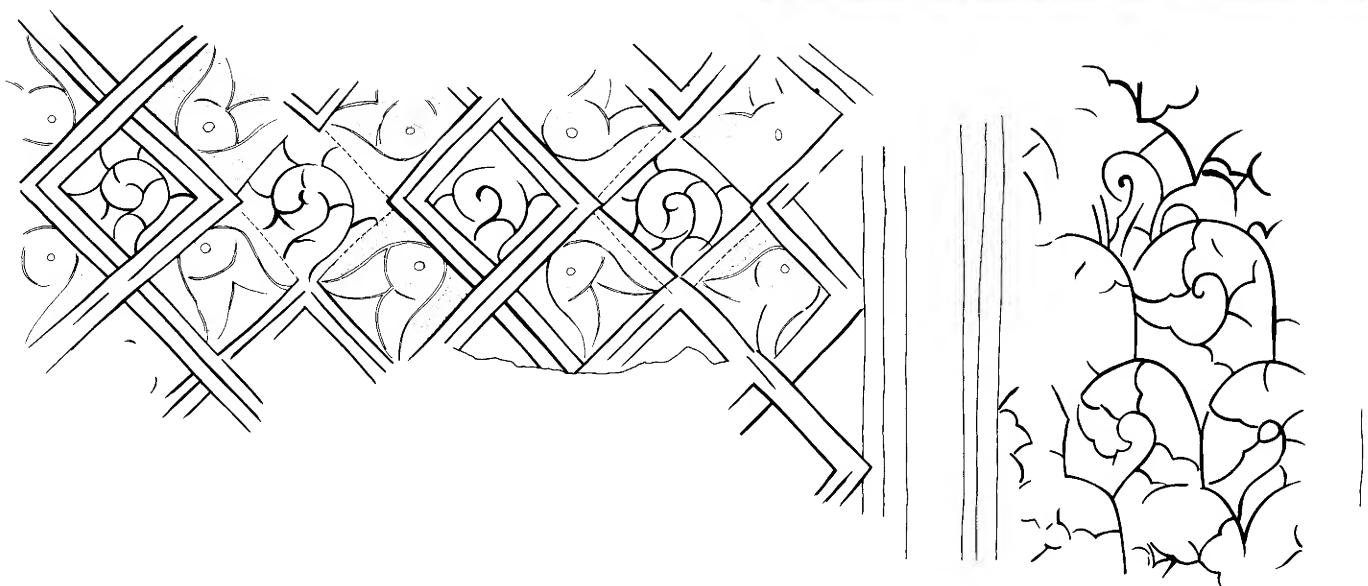
Northeast jamb of the doorway on the southeast side of 511 (see Plate 5). This painted panel is now in The Metropolitan Museum of Art (40.170.177). Drawing by William Schenck





1.197

Southwest jamb of the doorway on the southeast side of SII. Drawing by William Schenck



patches of several layers of plaster impregnated with salt that were impossible to remove. A portion of the panel in Figure 1.196, from the northeast side of the entranceway, was successfully removed and is now on exhibition in the Metropolitan Museum (Plate 5). Essentially a geometric pattern of squares and lozenges, all filled with curving lines that vaguely suggest leaves

and rosettes, the design hovers, as it were, between the world of nature and the realm of the imagination. The pattern on the narrow panel to the left, a simple grill of wavy lines, is the same as one found on the ninth- or tenth-century Rainer papyrus (Arnold and Grohmann, *Islamic Book*, pl. 3A). In Figure 1.197, the southwest jamb of the doorway, one can see that the panels of the dado were surmounted by a narrower border containing lozenges. This border, and the basic arrangement of alternating squarish and oblong panels enclosed in blue, white, and red borders, was also found on the dado in room w20. As will become clear, however, that is where the similarity ends.

The room designated w20, at the extreme edge of the excavations on the southwest side of the square, proved to be one of the most interesting found at Tepe Madraseh. In an early period, before the original floor level (at 95.06 m) was changed, all four of the room's walls had been decorated with painting in a style unlike any so far found in Iran (the only parallel being the panels in S11 at Tepe Madraseh).

The basic plan of w20—a room measuring 5 by 5.8 meters with khisht walls about 2 meters thick—was never altered, but over the centuries the paintings had been not only almost entirely buried as the floor level changed, four times in all, but obliterated with coats of smooth white plaster, the number of layers increasing with each level. At the topmost level (95.66 m), where the flooring was brick, the upper part of the dado on the southeast

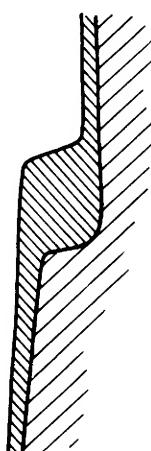


1.198

Latrine on the third level from the top in w20, looking east, December 8, 1939

## 1.199

Section of the painted plaster dado in w20. The light area is the kahgil wall; the darker shaded area is smooth white plaster. A running border was painted above the inset (which was about 1 cm deep); below it were large decorative panels

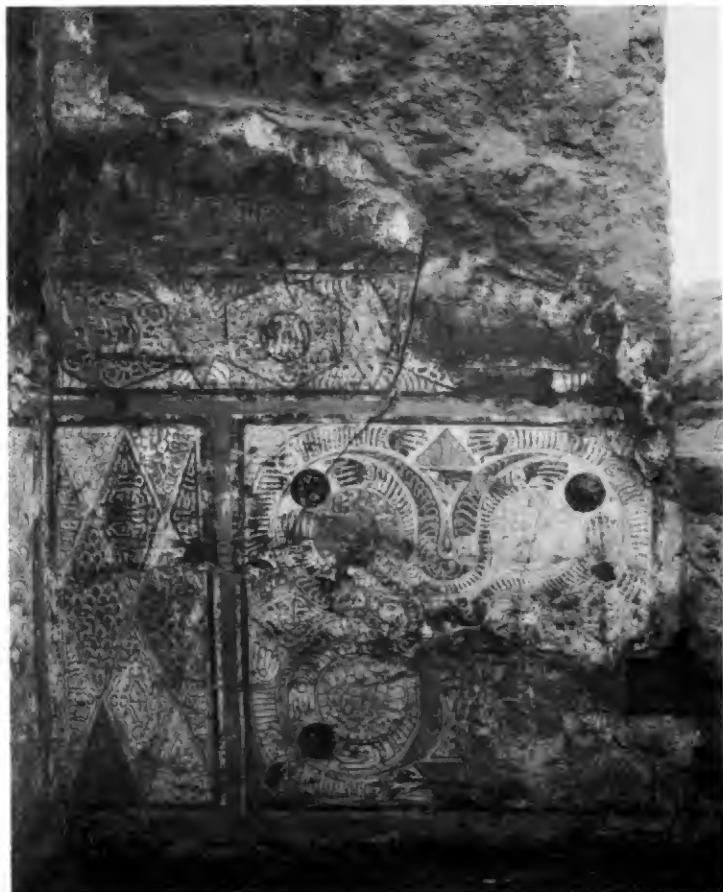


## 1.200–1.212

The painted dado in w20. The photographs are arranged as though one were walking counterclockwise around the room. All drawings by William Schenck

## 1.200

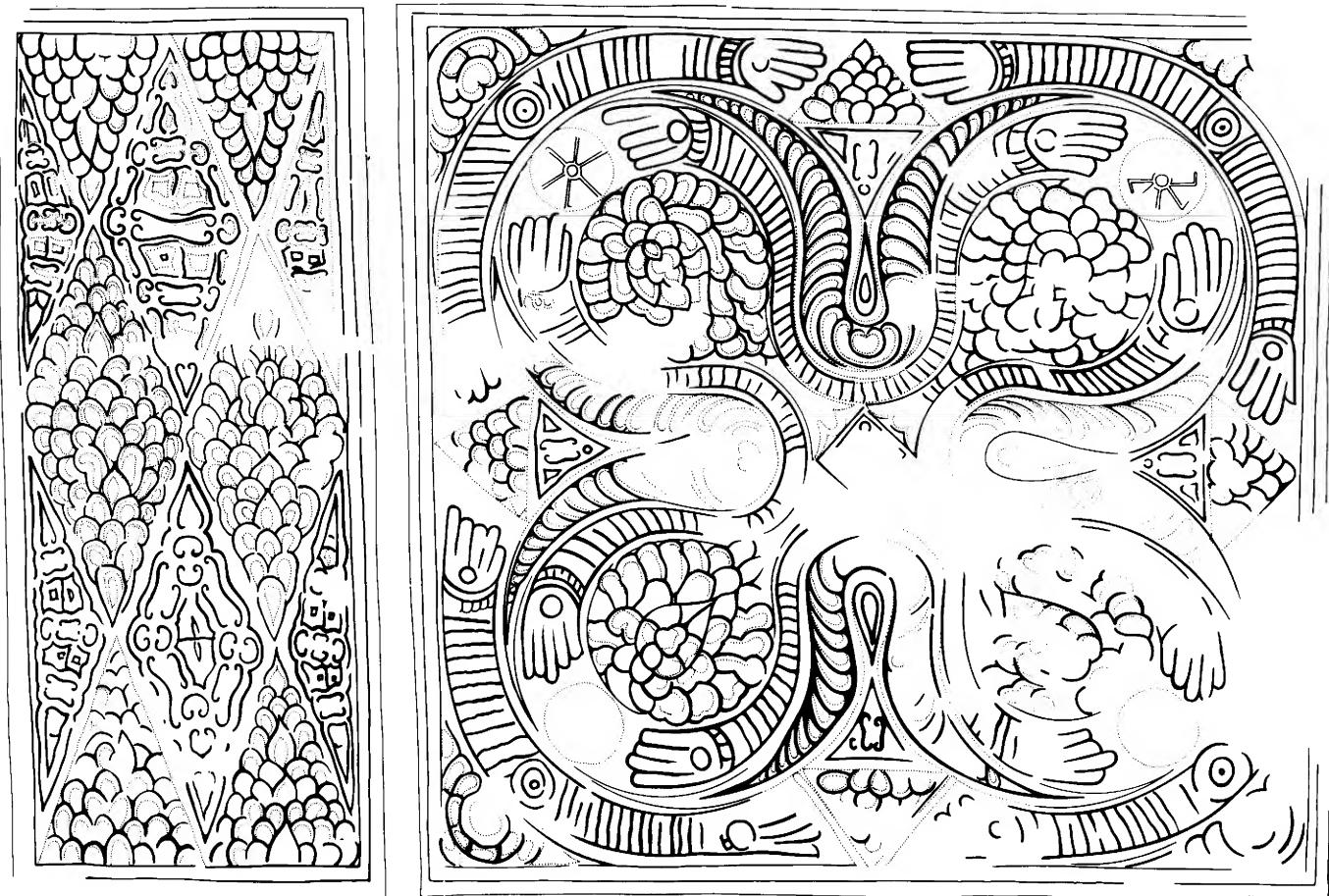
(right and opposite) Northeast wall on the lowest level of w20, left side near the north corner. These painted panels are now in the Muzé Iran Bastan, Teheran



wall was further damaged when a doorway about 90 centimeters wide was cut through into room w19. The second and fourth levels down had complete floors of white gatch. At a level of 95.31 meters the room suffered a fate similar to the round room's—it served as a latrine (Figure 1.198). On all levels the room had doorways opposite each other in the southwest and northeast walls; the door on the northeast side was narrowed by a meter before the first change in level. Before the room was decorated, an entrance on the northwest side had been closed off and filled in with khisht.

Once we had removed the upper level floors in w20, there remained the nerve-racking job of stripping the layers of white plaster from the walls. As was the case nearly everywhere else in Nishapur, the surfaces had not been scored to insure a tight bond, but even so the coats adhered so closely in places that some damage to the painted surface was unavoidable. When the painstaking process was as complete as possible, the painted dado that had adorned the room was once again visible, in parts to its full height of 1.27 meters (Figures 1.200–1.212).

The main part of the dado, the bottom 97 centimeters, was divided into alternating square and oblong panels that protruded about a centimeter from the wall surface above; Figure 1.199 shows how this was achieved. A horizontal band of hexagons and lozenges surmounted these tall panels. The dado itself was painted on a very thin layer of white plaster; the smooth kahgil on the wall surface above was primed red, like the surfaces above the carved plaster dadoes on the piers nearby (see Figures 1.147–1.154). The sections of painting forming a right angle in the north corner of the room, the most well preserved, were successfully removed from the walls. The pair of panels from the left side of the doorway in the northeast wall, together with the top border of the dado (Figures 1.200, 1.212), are now in the Teheran museum. The square panel and its adjacent rectangle from the northwest wall (Figure 1.201), without a top border, are on permanent exhibition in the Metropolitan Museum, and we are thus able to reproduce them in color (Plate 6). A brief description of the dado in w20, along with photographs of these two best-preserved sections, was published in the





1.201

(right and opposite) Northwest wall of w20, right side near the north corner (see Plate 6). These painted panels are now in The Metropolitan Museum of Art (40.170.176)

Museum's *Bulletin* in 1942 (see Hauser and Wilkinson, "Excavations at Nishapur," pp. 99-100, figs. 28, 29).

Even in the black-and-white photograph of the Metropolitan panels, if one looks closely one can see that the vague stripes down the center are part of a previous scheme of decoration. The earlier painting, also an arrangement of rectangular and square panels but without, it seemed, any decorative filling, bled through in several places on the walls. The vertical bands dividing the original panels had green centers edged with gray and outlined in red; they were filled with circles drawn in black, though in one case a somewhat different effect was achieved with a scalelike pattern of inverted U's so curved they looked like incomplete circles. There seemed to have been no change in the floor level between the two layers of painting, indicating that they may have been applied within a short time of each other. Perhaps the decoration was changed to satisfy the whim of someone who wanted a grander effect.

No earlier underpainting existed to the left of the doorway on the north-east side of the room, on the panels now in Teheran (Figure 1.200), indicating that this part of the wall was constructed to narrow the entrance sometime after the original decoration was applied. Brick had been incorporated into the wall here, and the plaster was not just a thin layer but very thick in parts and covered with a coat of red underpainting that showed through in such a way as to confuse the color scheme of the painted design.

When the dado in w20 was first uncovered, while the painting was still damp and before it had been exposed to sunlight, the narrow bands edging

the squares and oblongs of the lower section were a striking shade of vermillion, much more brilliant than the red covering the tops of the walls. Within a short time, the bands became almost black, and although some of the color eventually returned it never recovered its original brightness. The red was achieved mostly with cinnabar (mercuric sulphide); powdered lapis lazuli was used to create the intense blue of the broader framing bands set against pure white. The range of the palette, which also included black, yellow, and mixed colors such as blue-gray, dark earth red, a greenish yellow or sage green, and a pinkish buff, can be seen in Plates 6 and 7. The artist seems to have been following certain rules when applying the color: gray and red were outlined with black, blue and yellow with red.

Only a few pieces of the continuous band of border along the top of the dado escaped destruction, and only a small part of what survived was copied in the field, but the facsimile copy clearly illustrates both the color scheme and the design of hexagons separated by elongated lozenges (Plate 7). The



red in the border was the same less intense hue used on the plain walls above it. The wavy gray and white lines on the background and in the circles in the centers of the hexagons are meant to evoke either alabaster or one of the other striped, semitransparent stones commonly used for decorative purposes in Iran. The gray and red shapes around the edges of the hexagons strongly suggest peony petals. The peony, also known in Iran by a more colorful name, "the wild ass's rose," is indigenous to Turkistan, the home of the onager. Scalelike shapes with dark blue or yellow centers and paler edges fill the lozenges.

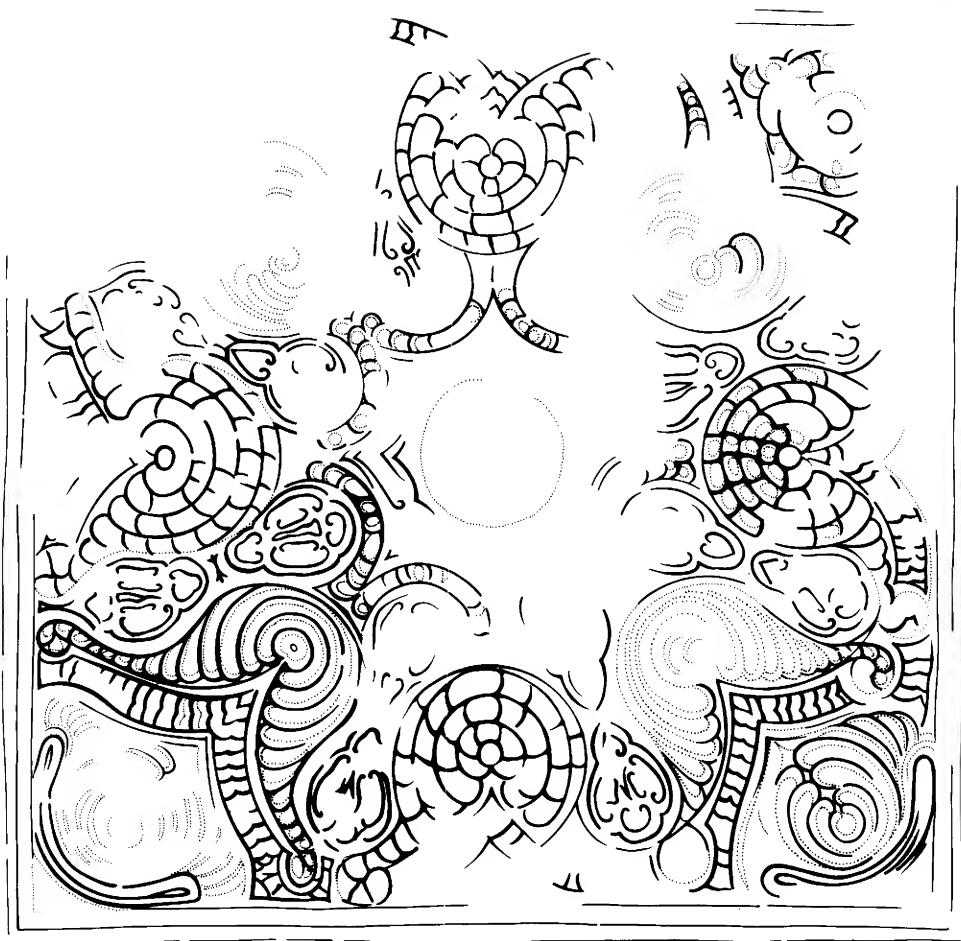
All but one of the oblong frames in the lower part of the dado enclose a network of lozenges filled alternately with curling black brackets on a white and bluish gray ground and with overlapping rows of scales much like those in the border lozenges. The black strokes may also represent some marblelike stone, though in a more stylized way. The treatment is only one of several features that make this painting unique. The scale motif is not peculiar to Nishapur; it appears on textiles in the ninth-century wall paintings in the Jausaq al-Khaqani harem at Samarra (Herzfeld, *Samarra* 3, pl. XLII, nos. 17–20). The exception is the panel in the east corner of the southeast wall, where a doorway was later cut through to w19 above the latrine level (Figure 1.210). Not only is the panel an odd size, wider than the other oblongs, but the design is different. Smaller lozenges have been added to the pattern, and though rows of petals are once again used as filling (except in one dark row near the bottom where meandering red lines on a black ground have been substituted), in the alternating lozenges the bracketlike strokes have been replaced by marbling in black, gray, and white. The overall effect is bizarre, made even more so by what seem to be several pairs of eyes staring out at the viewer. Similar "eyes" are incorporated into the oblong panel on the other side of the east corner (Figure 1.211).

The patterns in the squares are even more astonishing. They vary from panel to panel, but they are all compounded of the same elements, and there is little doubt that all were executed by the same artist. Every one of the designs is based on tangent and interlacing circles (the telltale marks of the artist's compass remain to this day on the plaster surface of the panels in the Metropolitan), and it is immediately apparent that they follow a Sasanian tradition of quadripartite design that is exemplified in the carved plaster decoration at Kish (Baltrusaitis, "Sasanian Stucco," p. 613, fig. 190). As in the work at Kish, medallions that look like pomegranates point outward at the corners of several of these squares, but here the fruits have lost their natural shape, and they are covered with the same two-tone scale pattern that was used throughout the dado to prevent any of the designs from becoming too "heavy."



1.202

Northwest wall of w20, right of center





1.203

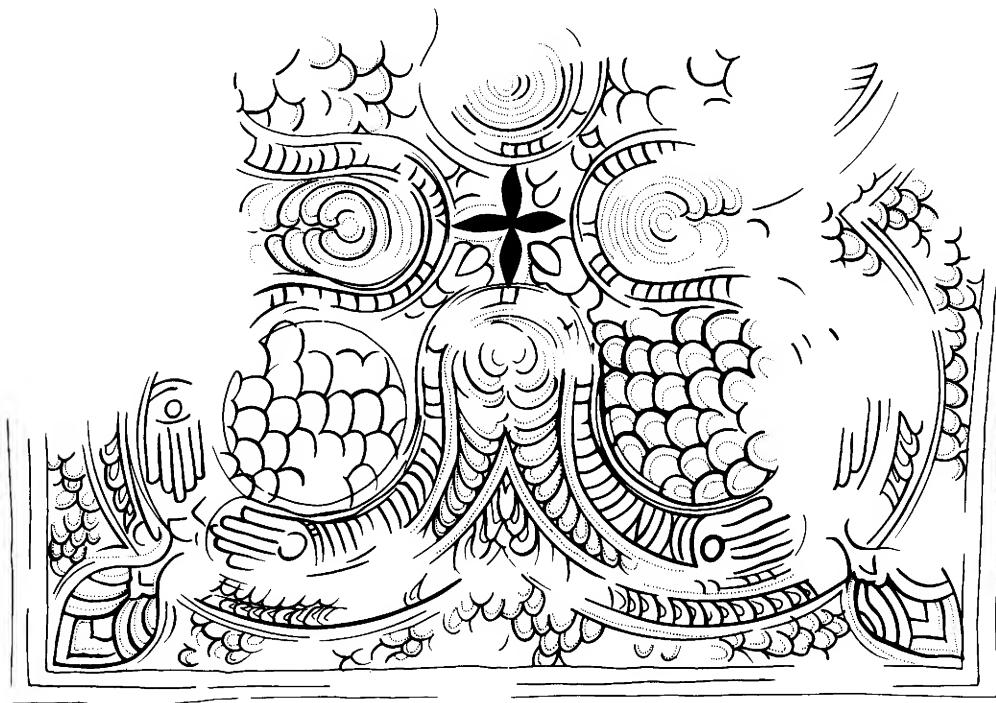
(above, right, and opposite) North-west wall of W20, left of center



The dominant theme of the square designs is also the most extraordinary aspect of this painting: the “arms” articulated by series of curved strokes that weave through all of the patterns. Many of the arms end in what can only be described as hands. The hand symbol is the sole motif in the dado that might allow us to make a connection with an Islamic subject. Yet it seems doubtful that this is a representation of the hand of Fatima so dear to Iranian Muslims, or that it relates to the story of a son of ‘Ali, Abu al-Fadl Abbas, who was killed at Karbala after his hand had been cut off. (Replicas of Abu al-Fadl Abbas’s hand are still carried in Muharram processions and

are worn as amulets by small boys.) Could this be the "hand of God" with apotropaic qualities that preceded Islam? (See Ettinghausen, "Lusterware of Spain," p. 150.)

Pairs of hands recur in several places in the painting, each time in a somewhat different way. In the panel from the northwest wall (Figure 1.201, Plate 6), arms defined with horizontal strokes emerge from a circle filled with curved black brackets to embrace the scale-covered "pomegranate" at each corner. The five-fingered hands have circles in the palms, and the wrists seem to be encircled by pearl bracelets. The entwining strands forming a cross in this panel are done in gray, white, and black lines that end in curious concentric circles. The four pairs of curling leaves with "petals" springing from the central ribs could also be wings. The dark centers of the petal-



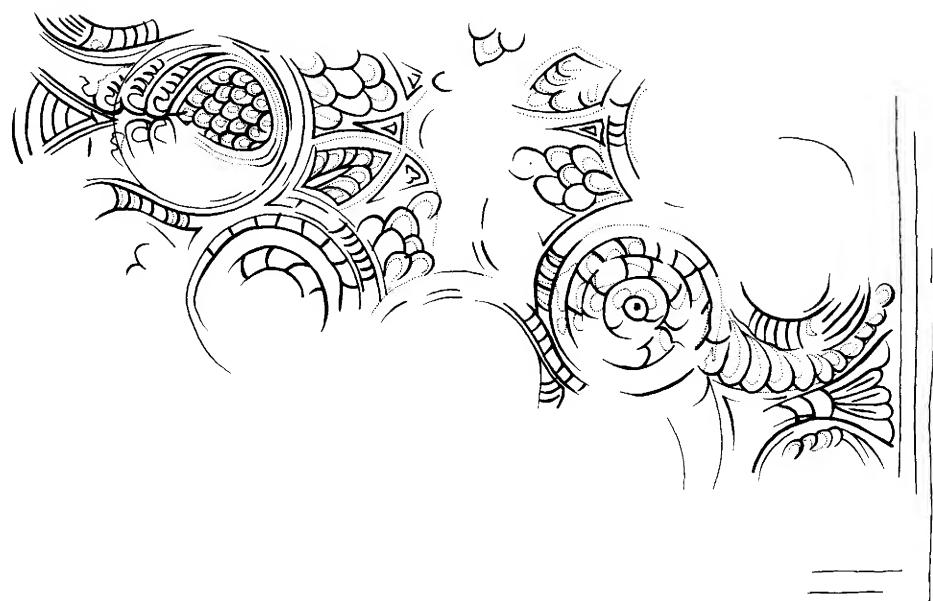
shaped forms, outlined in a lighter tone, suggest deep cuts; the effect is the only one in these paintings that recalls the technique of carving in plaster.

I shall proceed counterclockwise around the room to point out the peculiarities in the other square panels, for which only black-and-white photographs exist. The next panel to the left covers the place on the northwest wall where a doorway was filled in before the first layer of painting was applied (Figure 1.202). A few traces of white paint on the black disk at the center of the panel indicated that it was once decorated with a freely drawn rosette. According to notes made at the site, the whorls on either side of the



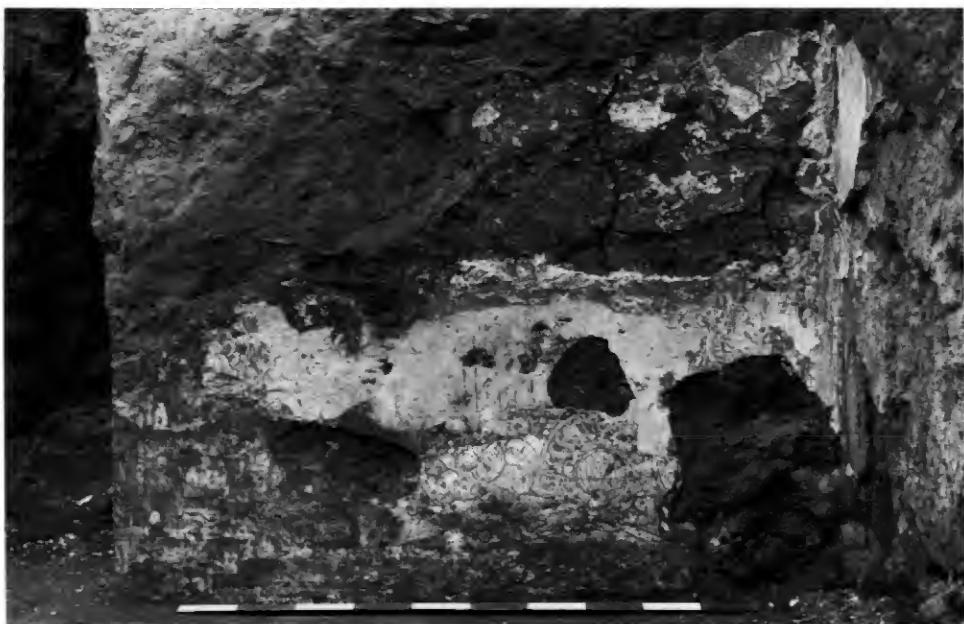
1.204

Northwest wall of w20, left side near  
the west corner



disk were blue with greenish gray edges, and their black outlines were red before the painting was exposed to light. The upper right portion of the design is confused where the earlier painting shows through (the red outlines on these vertical bands were also turned blackish by the light). The petals in the bottom right corner were painted the same reddish brown color the artist used in many of the square designs. In the next square, pairs of arms ending in hands advance toward the corners (Figure 1.203). The motif in the center, a small black quatrefoil with delicate pointed petals that touch to form a cross, was used just this once, at least so far as we could tell from what survived of the painting in the rest of the room. More hands figure in the panel to the left. The hand at the lower left, the easiest to see, is adorned with a circle containing a dot. The work here is more perfunctory—one hand has six fingers and the other five. The rest of the northwest wall was in extremely poor condition (Figure 1.204).

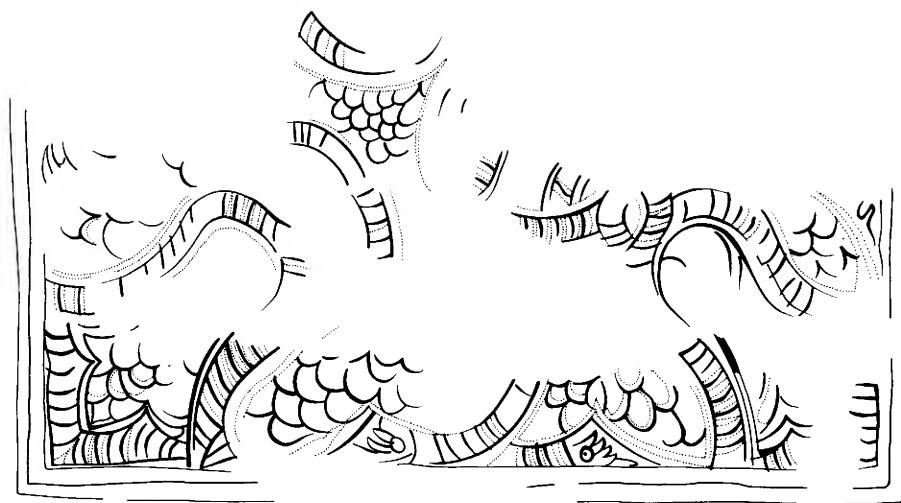
The southwest wall, just beyond which was the edge of the excavated area, was greatly damaged. Except for a small scrap of border near the south corner, the upper part of the dado was gone entirely. To the right of the door, which was 1.4 meters wide, there were large holes near the floor (Figure 1.205). The circles on the small part of the dado that remained had been struck with a compass. The notes we took at the time indicate that the scales on the “arm” in the center were reddish brown with buff edges, outlined in black. The small quatrefoil to the left was white and gray and also had a black outline; the petals surrounding it had intense blue centers and pale yellowish green outer edges inside a thin red line. Gray-and-white



1.205

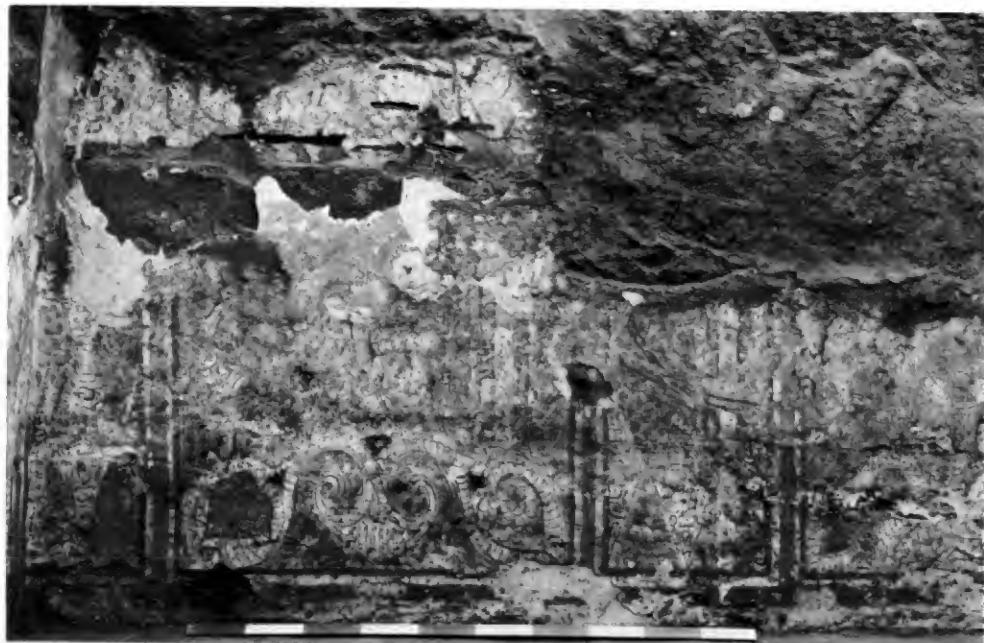
Southwest wall of w20, right side  
near the west corner

1.206  
Southwest wall of w20, center  
section



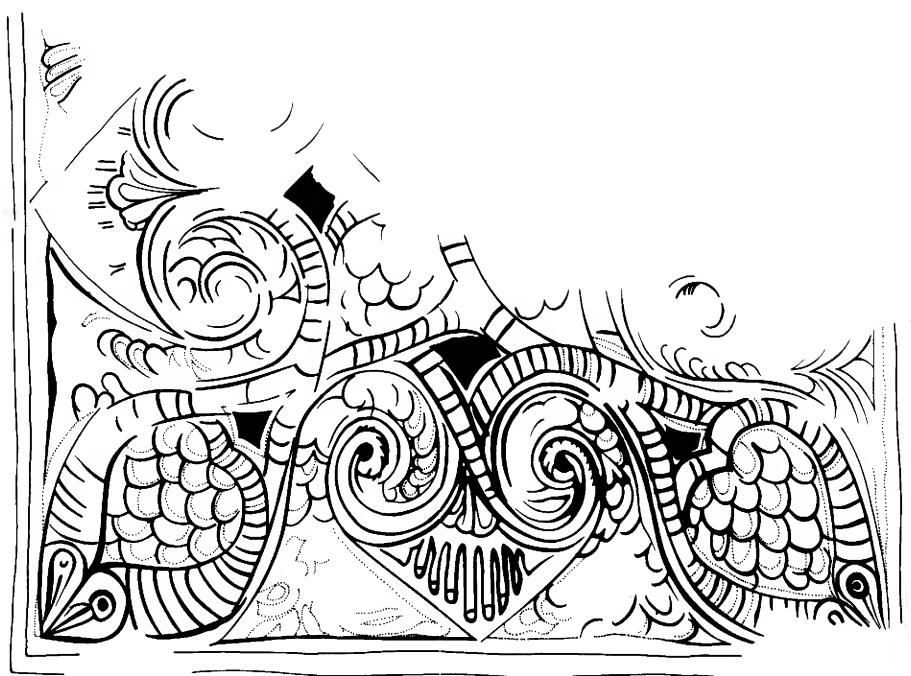
marbling filled the circle at the far right, near the west corner. Very little remained of the square panels to the left of the door (Figures 1.206, 1.207), but it is clear that the designs, though different from those on the other walls, are related and are by the same artist. The arms here might be better described as stems, for they end in curled tendrils rather than hands. On the panel near the south corner (Figure 1.207) the pomegranates have become heart-shaped.

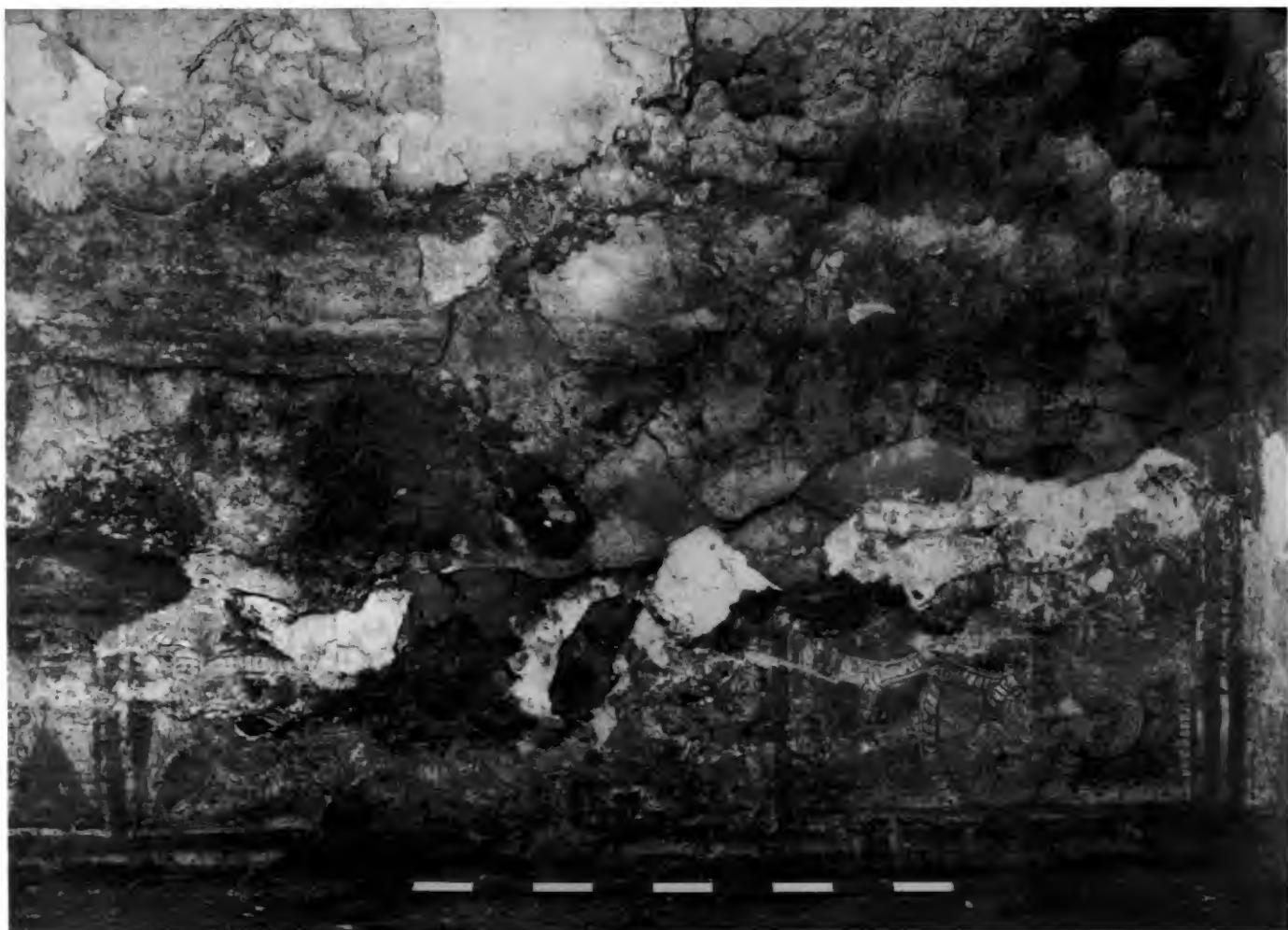
The artist was seemingly more interested in creating an intricate pattern than in representing anything from nature in the design on the square at the south corner of the southeast wall (Figure 1.208 right). The “arms” or “stems” end in trilobed forms shaped more or less like buds. The top part of the dado on this entire wall was also severely damaged, though some traces of the continuous band of the upper border survived under the many coats



1.207

Southwest wall of w20, left side near the south corner





1.208

(above, right, and opposite) South-east wall of W20, right side near the south corner



of plaster. Two of the square patterns (Figures 1.208 left, 1.209 right) incorporate hands groping toward the pointed tops of bulbous medallions. On both, the hands were white decorated with gray circles with black dots at their centers. Short, curved, evenly spaced horizontal lines like those on several of the panels without hands have been drawn on the arms in the next panel (Figure 1.209 left). There are no definite hands on this panel. The arrangement of the square on the far left (Figure 1.210), just before the odd oblong I have already described and below where a doorway was later cut through at a high level, resembles that in the panel in Teheran (Figures 1.200, 1.212).

Strangely crude hands appear again, at the ends of positively snakelike arms that twist around forms vaguely suggesting pomegranates, on the square nearest the east corner on the northeast side of the room (Figure 1.211). The palms have no circles, and these wrists seem to be wearing bangles. The painting on the wall from here to the doorway was irretrievably damaged in antiquity. Only the lower part of the adjacent rectangular design and a small corner of the next square, where the hands have square-tipped fingers, remain.

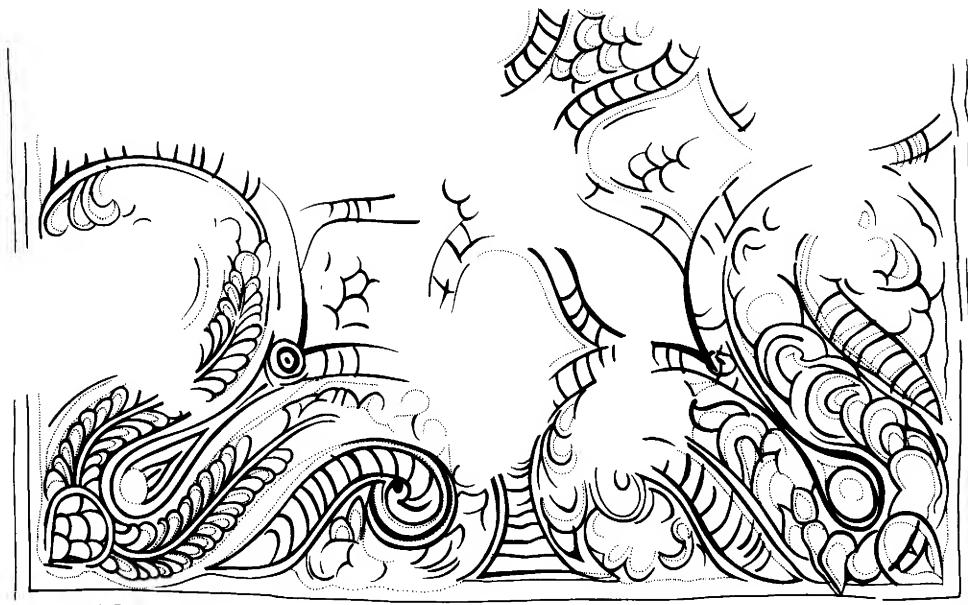
On the panel to the left of the northwest entrance, the one now in Teheran, the details are difficult to see (Figure 1.212, and see 1.200). The series of radiating white lines decorating the four black disks have barely survived, though the one or two remaining suggest they may have been many-armed swastikas. The color of the disks negates the hypothesis that they symbolize the sun, but just what they do represent is a mystery, and the mystery is only enhanced by the pairs of hands reaching toward them. The





1.209

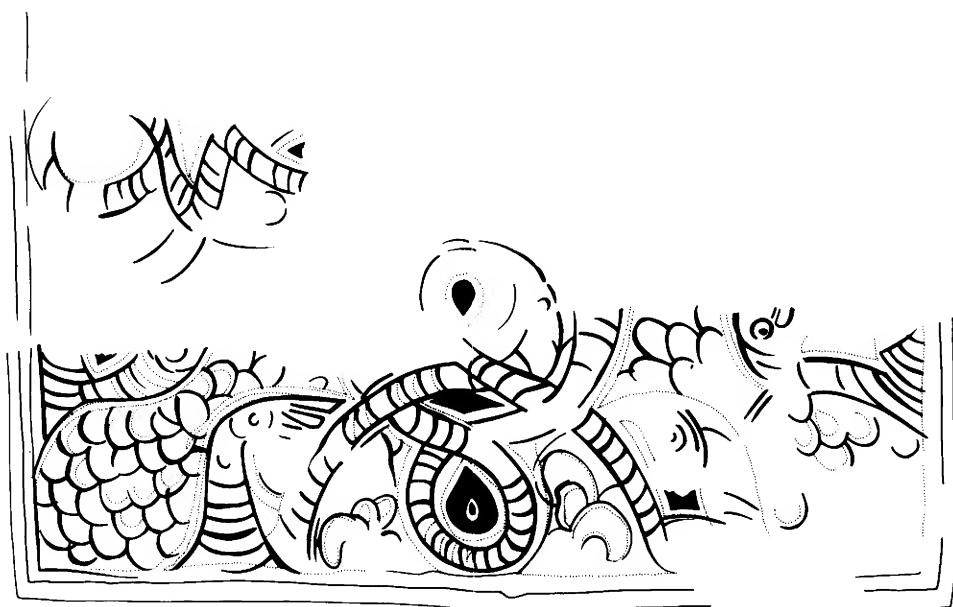
(above, right, and opposite) South-east wall of W20, center section

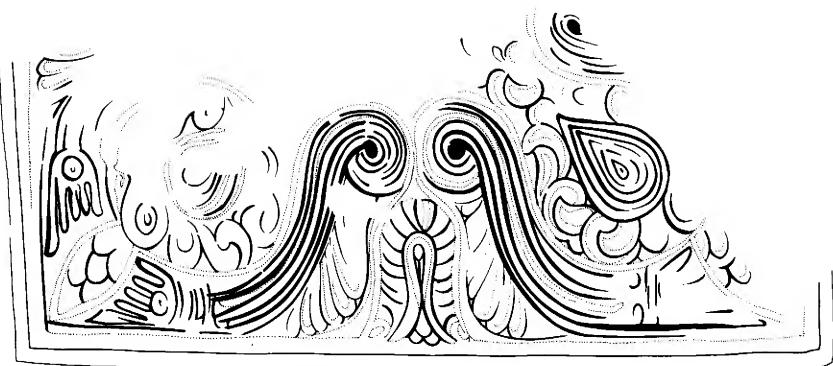
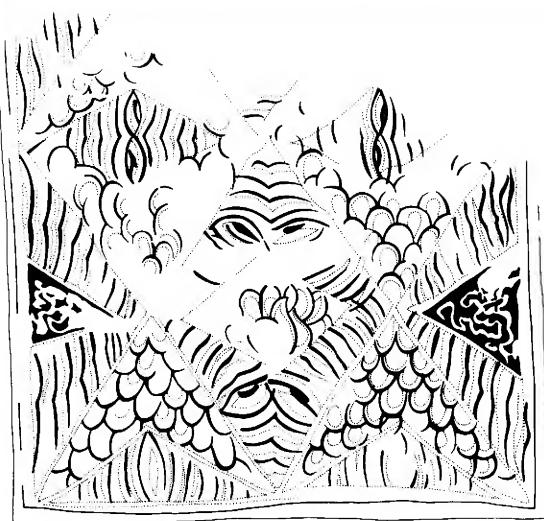


pomegranates embraced by the arms in the corners have cone-shaped centers surrounded by petals. Again, the whole effect suggests a peony. The petals at the bottom left and upper right corners were yellow and probably had green centers; the outlines were red. In the opposite corners they were blue edged with sage green, the same color scheme used on the narrow panel to the left. Yet more hands reach toward the triangles placed midway on the sides of the square. The triangle at the top and the inverted one at the bottom, filled with almost circular forms painted blue with sage green edges, could be dishes of fruit. The less well-preserved triangles at the sides, however, seem to have been treated merely as spaces to be decorated, for they contain the ubiquitous scale pattern, this time in green with yellowish edging and black outlines. We can therefore only speculate what the artist really intended.

Knowing the function of the room might have helped us to decipher the paintings, but we found nothing as we cleared W20 and the rooms around it that even hinted at its original purpose. We know only that much later the room was used as a latrine, but that was long after the paintings had been buried beneath layers of detritus. There were no liwans built around the walls, so we can guess that this was not a place where people gathered to sit and talk or rest, and the room was without a qibleh.

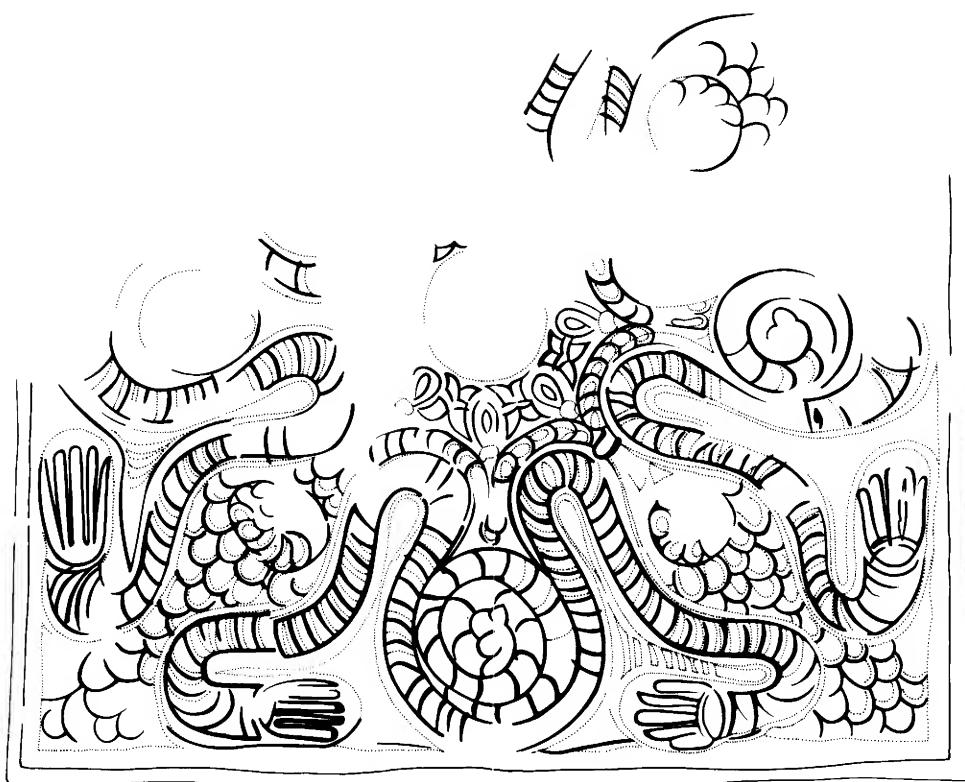
For all we know, whoever designed this dado may have been commissioned just to cover the walls with decoration. After laying out the overall pattern of squares and oblongs, the artist may simply have proceeded around the room, seeing each square as a new opportunity for a fourfold repetition of yet another variation on a basic theme of arcs and circles. Neither the





1.210

Southeast wall of w20, left side near the east corner. In this section of the wall a doorway about 90 cm wide was cut through above the latrine level (see 1.198)



1.211

Northeast wall of w20, right side  
near the east corner



1.212

Northeast wall of w20, center and left side near the north corner (the same panels are shown in 1.200)

Nishapur excavations nor any of the other archaeological sites in Iran, so far as I know, have given us any clues to the true meaning of the multiple hands.

Other rooms in the complex may also once have been adorned with wall painting, but in most places the destruction was so thorough that not a scrap was found on the walls. From a well on the middle level in room Y9 we retrieved a small fragment of painting that showed no signs of having been covered by coats of thin plaster (Figure 1.213). This painting is completely different, in both arrangement and detail, from the dadoes in S11 and w20. The design is lighter in spirit and less formal. A pattern of waves drawn in black with blue centers and enclosed by narrow red bands forms the outer border; the inner border is a row of white circles on a black background. All is very vague and sketchy, but the general pattern below the borders suggests trefoils, what may be quatrefoils, and what look like blue grapes in small, irregular bunches, all emerging from winding stems.

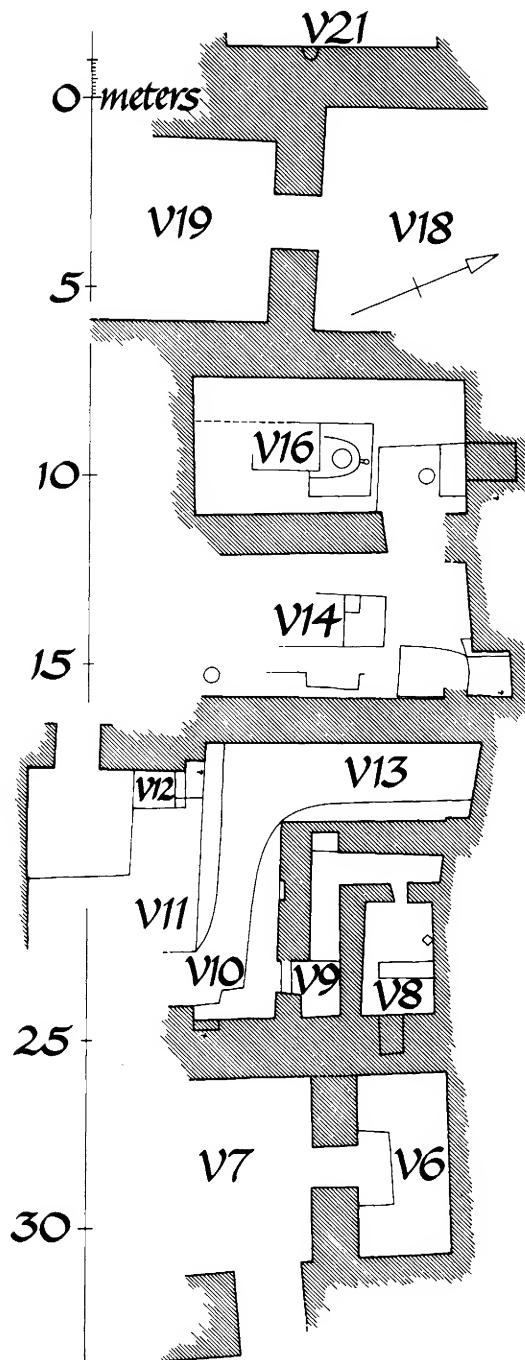


1.213

Fragments of painted plaster from a well in Y9. Wave pattern at the top blue and white with black outlines and red framing bands, inner border white on black, foliate design below blue, light red, and white with black outlines on a yellow ground. Height about 19 cm, width about 24 cm

# The Vineyard Tepe

1:200



## Chapter 2

# THE VINEYARD TEPE



2.1

The Vineyard Tepe before it was excavated, looking west, 1936

WHILE WE WERE digging at Tepe Madraseh the owner of the land on which the Vineyard Tepe lay, about 400 meters to the west, often sat perched on a suitably elevated piece of wall, observing what was going on (see Figure 1.26). In all likelihood his great interest in antiquities had a far from beneficial effect on the ruins in the mound. Nonetheless, it was fortunate indeed that his wish that part of his vineyard be excavated was fulfilled.

The site had suffered severe damage when deep furrows were cut through it to cultivate grapevines, and there was evidence of more recent molestation (Figure 2.1). We were able to excavate but a part of what we soon realized was a complex of buildings not unlike the palatial structures at Tepe Madraseh and much grander than anything we found at Sabz Pushan. These buildings, their substantial walls sometimes as much as 1 to 2 meters thick, had obviously housed someone of importance in Nishapur. Fragments of the elaborate carved plaster and stone dadoes that had once adorned the walls lay scattered amid the detritus, and in the only room to be preserved in its entirety (v6-7, at the southeast end of the excavated area) we discovered a unique painting, a depiction of a mounted huntsman more than a meter high, that could only have been commissioned by a patron of some means.

The digging was restricted to so small an area that we were unable to ascertain the size of the complex or how it had been laid out, and even the

few rooms we did clear were in such poor condition that it was impossible to determine precisely how they had functioned in relation to one another. The sketchy plan of the site reflects our many unanswered questions.

Collapsed walls and fallen plaster suggested damage by earth tremors. Two skeletons unearthed from the wreckage provided almost definite proof. One had perished in a doorway, where Iranians traditionally take refuge during earthquakes; the other was found buried beneath a toppled wall (Figures 2.2, 2.3; it is unfortunate that in his article "Earthquakes in the History of Nishapur" Charles Melville was unable to make use of these and other photographs taken by the Museum's expedition that show visible damage).

Although they merely give a post quem date, the few coins retrieved from the Vineyard Tepe seemed to support our hypothesis that these buildings, which appeared to be contemporary with those at Sabz Pushan and many of those at Tepe Madraseh, were destroyed in the earthquake of 1145



2.2

Skeleton in the doorway of v7

and never rebuilt. We found fourteen coins, which Joseph M. Upton tabulated as follows:

2nd half 8th century	3
8th/9th century	3
1st half 9th century	1
1st half 10th century	7

Furthermore, had the site been inhabited during the last half of the twelfth century and later, it would surely have produced alkaline-glazed pottery, and none was found. All of the pottery recovered was either unglazed or lead-glazed. Some time after the digging at the Vineyard was completed, the expedition discovered signs of ancient kilns not far away, near the wall enclosing the garden planted around the tomb of Muhammad Mahruq. The area was not excavated, but from the surface we picked up sherds and wasters of alkaline-glazed ware probably of the twelfth, perhaps of the thirteenth, century. The buildings in the Vineyard Tepe must have been abandoned before the kilns began operation.

There seemed to have been three main levels of occupation at the site, with the second level about 30 centimeters below the highest, or most recent, floor and the lowermost level another 26 centimeters down. On all levels construction was exclusively of sun-dried brick; no kiln-fired brick had been used in the Vineyard either for foundations or for decorative purposes. Both floors and walls were coated with fine white plaster that had been renewed often, normally four or five times.



2.3

Skeleton discovered under a mass of fallen wall in v7. The unfortunate victim had a broken spine, a fractured pelvis, a displaced clavicle, and a fractured cranium



2.4

Hearth in v16, with its airduct partially exposed

2.5

v16 after further clearing, when it could be seen that the fireplace intruded into a sunken, plaster-lined area in the floor of the earlier period



At no time had the orientation of the rooms been changed, but as was common in living quarters built of khisht and chineh, areas within the rooms had been periodically altered, often in the most confusing ways. Parts of the floors had been raised or lowered, and we found signs of alterations to the liwans built against the walls, as well as in the positions of the entryways. In room v16, shown in Figure 2.4 (which also gives a good indication of the floor levels), a fireplace like those found at Tepe Madraseh and, particularly, Sabz Pushan (see Figures 1.60, 3.7–3.10) had been constructed in a plaster-lined sunken area in the center of the floor of the earlier level. As can be seen in Figure 2.5, a view of the room after further clearing, in this case the airduct leading into the hearth was still intact. At this level, more sunken areas in the plaster floor were revealed. Figure 2.6 shows that v16 was originally provided with liwans.

In v6–7, the most complete of the few rooms excavated, a partition was installed sometime after the outer walls of the originally long, narrow room were constructed, for neither of the two transverse wings of the partitions was bonded to the wall it abutted. Room v7, the larger of the two sections, had been decorated with splendid, intricately carved plaster dadoes (see



2.6

Lowest level of v16, where liwans lined the walls. The hole in the foreground is a well



2.7

Layers of white plaster floor in v7

Figures 2.11, 2.12). A small fragment, the only carved plaster found in situ in the whole of the tepe, still clung to the southeast wing of the dividing wall; all the rest had fallen to the floor and lay in fragments.

No fewer than fourteen coats of white plaster had been applied to the floor on the uppermost level of v7 (Figure 2.7). Whereas such frequent refurbishing would not have been extraordinary in a bathhouse, where damp conditions cause plaster surfaces to deteriorate rapidly, here it was inexplicable. The room must have served some very important ceremonial purpose, for only a floor subjected to heavy traffic would have been so often in need of a fresh coat of plaster. The partition made of v6 a sort of anteroom, to which the doorway centered in the partition wall provided the only access. Save for an area just inside the entrance, the topmost floor of v6 was raised 27 centimeters above the level of that of v7.

No carved plaster was found in v6. Its walls had been covered with layer upon layer of thin white plaster on which line drawings and inscriptions were painted in black. The drawings revealed when we first cleared the room were nothing more than rough sketches, or graffiti. Hidden beneath the many coats of plaster on the northwest wall, however, extending behind



2.8  
Lower end of the L-shaped alleyway  
(V10)

the partition, was a painting any artist would be proud of: the detailed, skillfully executed hunting scene that proved to be the most exciting find in the Vineyard.

On the other side of the massive northwest wall of V6-7 we cleared an L-shaped portion of a narrow alleyway (V10, V13), with raised curbs at the sides, that wound its way between rooms whose functions we were never able to determine (Figure 2.8). At the top end of the L, on the southeast wall, someone had scratched a rather crude sketch of a horse and rider into the white stucco surface (see Figure 2.33).

#### CARVED STONE AND PLASTER

Many of the drawings in the rooms of the Vineyard Tepe seemed to have been abandoned before their purpose was fully achieved. This was not the case with other forms of wall decoration, which had obviously been carried out to completion and then suffered the fate of either willful or accidental destruction. The most tantalizing such instance strengthened our contention that this mound had indeed been the site of a building complex inhabited by a person or persons of high rank. From V14, a room that had undergone many changes in its plastered flooring, especially in recent times, we retrieved three small fragments of alabasterlike white stone, all that remained of what must have been an impressive decoration. What was left of the white plastered wall surfaces in V14 gave no indication whatsoever that the fragments had come from decoration in the room itself.

Two of the pieces, from a stone slab 2.2 centimeters thick, are carved with floral and geometric designs and probably came from a dado (Figure 2.9). Although we have but small scraps of the patterns to go by, they appear to be a later development of a style that goes back to the ninth century at Samarra (see, for example, Herzfeld, *Samarra* 1, fig. 112). The two patterned

2.9  
(right) Fragments of stone from V14.  
Carved white alabasterlike stone  
with a painted blue background.  
Left: height 20.5 cm, width 6 cm,  
depth 2.2 cm; The Metropolitan  
Museum of Art (40.170.672)

2.10  
(far right) Fragment of a stone in-  
scription from V14. Carved white  
alabasterlike stone, weather-stained  
brown, with a painted blue back-  
ground. Height 17.4 cm, width 16.8  
cm, depth 2.5 cm. The Metropolitan  
Museum of Art (40.170.671)





2.11

v<sub>7</sub> looking into v<sub>6</sub>, showing the carved plaster in situ on the right-hand wing of the partition wall (see 2.12). At the left, one can see that the partition is not bonded to the wall it abuts



2.12

Fragment of a carved plaster dado in situ in v<sub>7</sub>, on the southeast wing of the partition between v<sub>7</sub> and v<sub>6</sub>

fragments show no obvious connection with the third piece, part of a band of inscription in handsome foliated Kufic (Figure 2.10). The lettering bears a close stylistic resemblance to inscriptions found in Cairo at al-Azhar and in the mosque of al-Hakim, which date to 970–72 and 1002, respectively (Creswell, *Muslim Architecture of Egypt*, pls. 7, 30). Traces of blue paint remain on the backgrounds of all three stone fragments. No carved plaster was found in v<sub>14</sub>.

Natural disasters, plows, and looters had also all but destroyed the carved plaster decoration in the Vineyard Tepe. The one fragment found in situ, part of a panel on the lower portion of the southeast wing of the partition in room v<sub>7</sub>, was not only very small but in lamentable condition (Figures 2.11, 2.12). Nevertheless, its significance was obvious, for its position on the dividing wall, definitely a later addition, proved beyond a doubt

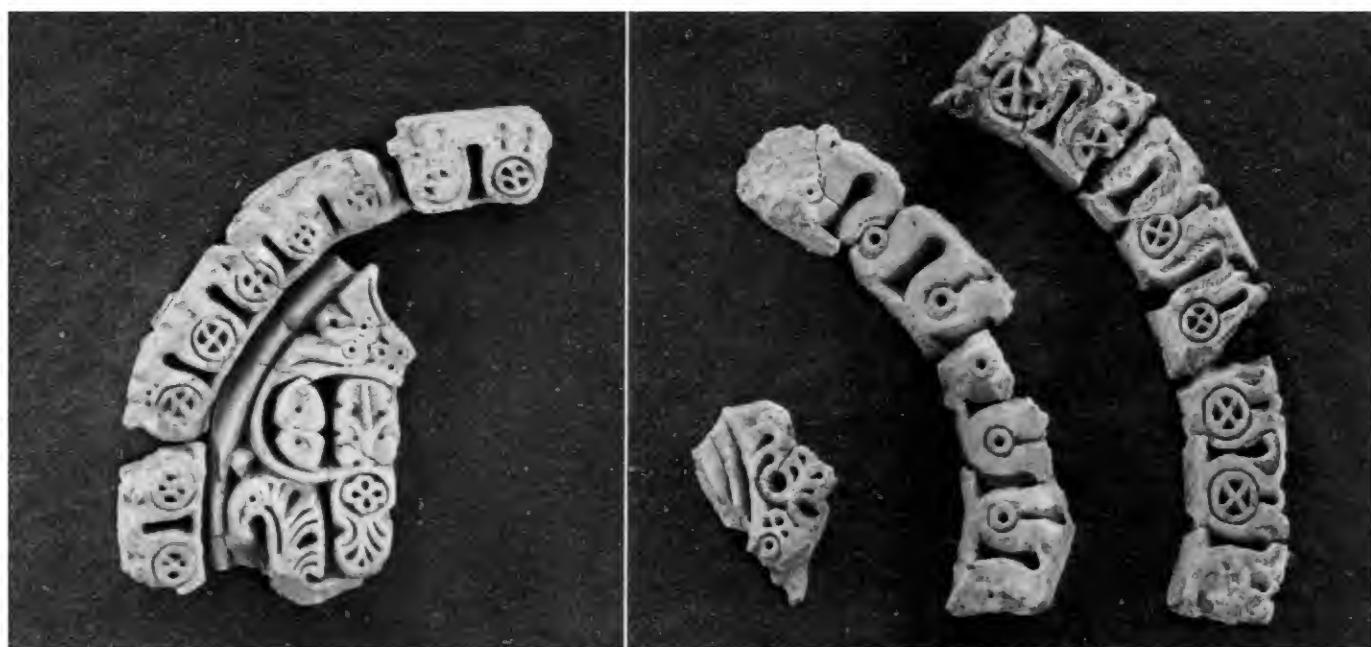
## 2.13

Frags of carved plaster, top two from V12, others sifted from the fill in V7. Lettering white on a blue ground; piece at bottom left has traces of red and yellow paint at the top. Top left: height 8.1 cm, width 9.5 cm, depth 5.2 cm; The Metropolitan Museum of Art (40.170.683)



## 2.14

Frags of carved plaster from V7. Note the bird's head in the filling that survives in the border at the left. Surface paint eroded; blue paint in the recesses of some pieces. Left (on which no color survives): height 27 cm, width 16.1 cm; The Metropolitan Museum of Art (40.170.685)



that the carved plaster could not have belonged to the initial period, either in v7 or in the other rooms where we found fragments of carving, all contemporary with the carved plaster in v7 and all of a later date than the painting on the walls of v6. We had no way of knowing, however, just when the work had been done, nor were we able to establish any kind of sequence. Only in the prayer hall at Tepe Madraseh did we find a clear sequence in the carved plaster decoration (see Figure 1.125).

The carved plaster that had fallen from the walls at the Vineyard was fortunately in a better state of preservation. Fragments were sifted from the fill in room v7 (Figures 2.13 lower group, 2.14, 2.15, 2.18 third row center, 2.21, 2.22); in v11–12, a small room off the alleyway that had raised platforms in its floor (Figures 2.13 top, 2.16–2.20); and in v18 and v23, two completely devastated rooms, only one of which (v18) is mapped on the plan of the site (Figures 2.23–2.27). The shape of two large segments pulled from the rubble in v18 suggested the room had been surmounted by a dome or cupola (Figures 2.28–2.31), yet more evidence attesting to the former magnificence of the site.

Even in the little that survived of the dadoes in the Vineyard one can make out several details strikingly similar to motifs used in the carved plaster the expedition uncovered in the other mounds at Nishapur, and enough remains to allow comparisons with wall decoration excavated at other sites in the Near East. Fragments pieced together from the finds in room v7 make clear that the dadoes there incorporated circular bands of different types of



2.15

Fragment of carved plaster from v7.  
Traces of red and blue paint in the recesses, yellow on the wide bands.  
Height 24.8 cm, width 36.5 cm,  
depth 6.8 cm. The Metropolitan  
Museum of Art (40.170.687)



2.16

(above left) Fragments of carved plaster from V12. Blue paint in the recesses on center pieces in second row from top. Scale about 1:7

2.17

(above right) Fragments of carved plaster borders from V11. Second from top has a white surface with blue paint in the hollows; wide edgings on the others painted yellow. Scale about 1:7



tulip-shaped forms filled with vine leaves, quatrefoils, and half-palmettes whose tips curve into what can only be described as birds' heads (Figure 2.14). These motifs bear a strong resemblance to those used at Tepe Madraseh in the lower, and thus older, layer of carved plaster found in situ in the prayer hall and repeated in contemporary fragments recovered from area C2, outside the north corner of the hall (see Figures 1.125, 1.136). Similar patterns occur in the cut plaster from Sabz Pushan (see Figures 3.20–3.25, 3.28, 3.33). The bird's-head motif, found not only at Tepe Madraseh and at Sabz Pushan, where it figures prominently in the carved plaster dadoes, but also in wall decoration at other Near Eastern cities (see the discussion accompanying Figure 1.136), appears as well in the fallen plaster recovered from V11–12 (Figures 2.16, 2.18).

The design on a piece of border retrieved from V7 (Figure 2.21), an elaborate pattern of palmettes and leaves on a zigzag stem, is identical to one used at Tepe Madraseh on the earlier decoration in the prayer hall and on fragments from C2. A border pattern from V11 (Figure 2.17 third row from



2.18

(above left) Fragments of carved plaster, center piece in third row from top from v7, others from v11-12. Blue paint in the recesses on bottom center and outer pieces in the row above. Scale about 1:7

2.19

(above right) Fragments of carved plaster from v11. Blue paint in the recesses on top row center, second and third rows left, and outer pieces in the bottom row. Scale about 1:7

2.20

Fragments of carved plaster from v11. Yellow paint on the framing bands on bottom left and center, center row right, and top right and center, which also has blue across the bottom edge; blue paint in the recesses on center row left. Scale about 1:7





2.21

(above left) Fragments of a carved plaster border from V7. Yellow paint on the framing bands, red on the bottom strip. Height 12.4 cm, width 27.5 cm, depth 4.1–4.7 cm. The Metropolitan Museum of Art (40.170.684)

2.22

(above right) Fragment of carved plaster from V7. Height about 19 cm, width about 21 cm

top) appears in carved plaster from Sabz Pushan (see Figures 3.37–3.39). Another border motif from V11 (Figure 2.20 bottom row center) is a characteristic combination of swastikas and quatrefoils that existed in Iran in bolder form even before the advent of Islam in the late seventh century. The design continued to be developed in Nishapur, for a later version is to be seen at Tepe Madraseh in the cut plaster decoration found at a high level in the prayer hall and on fragments found outside the entranceway in area A (see Figures 1.119, 1.130–1.132).

Three other border designs from V11, also shown in Figure 2.17, are unique to the Vineyard. The pieces forming part of an octagon may well have been filled with designs like those on a fragment discovered in V7, which has the same “folded” border (Figure 2.22).

What remains of the dadoes in the Vineyard rooms bears witness to the skill and talent of the Nishapur artisan or artisans who created them. This decoration, like much of the plasterwork from Sabz Pushan and Tepe Madraseh, was carved with the same mixture of confidence and attention to detail that characterizes the cut plaster found at Balkh, to the east (see examples illustrated in Golombek, “Mosque at Balkh”). On the two large fragments from the collapsed dome in V18 the carving is particularly bold, and other pieces retrieved from both V18 (Figures 2.23–2.26, 2.28–2.31) and V11–12 (Figures 2.16, 2.18, 2.19) demonstrate, once again, the ingenuity with which the Nishapur craftsmen combined several carving techniques in a wide variety of geometric and floral patterns. These round and oval shapes are reminiscent of those used on the cavetto cornice found in area C2 at Tepe Madraseh (see Figures 1.141–1.143), but here the backgrounds are enlivened not only with lattice designs but also with cut stars, triangles, circles, teardrops, and arrowheads.

In a Samanid palace excavated at Afrasiyab, north of Balkh, the style of the stucco decoration is much less forceful. The carvers used a great many



2.23

Fragments of carved plaster from V18. Originally polychromed. Scale about 1:8



2.24

Fragments of carved plaster from V18. Scale about 1:8



2.25

Fragments of carved plaster from V18. Yellow paint on the lettering on the two bottom pieces. Scale about 1:8

## 2.26

Fragments of carved plaster from v18. Top right (which is affixed to yellow bricks): raised surfaces painted white; height 28.2 cm, width 17.8 cm, depth 3.5–7.6 cm; The Metropolitan Museum of Art (40.170.686)



## 2.27

Fragments of carved plaster from v23. Top piece has a red background, center piece has blue paint in the recesses and a yellow strip along the bottom, and the lower group of fragments, with a Kufic inscription, has blue in the recesses and a touch of red at the lower edge. Later, all were whitewashed. Bottom: height about 38 cm, width about 33 cm



geometric designs filled with patterns of leaves—in most cases embellished only with deep V-shaped or triangular slots cut into the backgrounds or into the surfaces of the leaflike forms—a type of decoration not found in any of the plasterwork excavated at Nishapur. In their book *Reznoy shtuk Afrasiaba* (Carved stucco of Afrasiyab), I. Akhrarov and L. I. Rempel include photographs and drawings of the restored decoration in the palace, which they attribute to the ninth century (though they are careful to point out that others have doubts about such an early dating). Careful examination of these photographs reveals that in at least two instances in the palace the Afrasiyab artists departed from their usual method of cutting and used motifs that provide intriguing links to the work at Nishapur.

On one of the fragments retrieved from the palace, the spines of the half-palmettes are decorated with two curved triangular slots flanking a circle (Figure 2.32a, and see *ibid.*, fig. 22). The same distinctive slotting enhances the half-palmettes in the repetitive designs on the dome pieces from V18 (Figures 2.28–2.31), and it reappears on a piece of leaf from V12 (Figure 2.16). This peculiar decorative element is not found at Balkh or Samarra, nor does it appear at Rayy or in the mosque of Ibn Tulun in Cairo. At Nishapur, this type of slotting occurs only in the carved plaster from the Vineyard, although an echo of its shape, so to speak, appears on a piece of cayetto cornice we retrieved from the small sondage we called the Wart (see Figure 1.165, Plate 2).

In the decorative stucco framing the wide central doorway of the palace at Afrasiyab, and in the dadoes in a domed room there (Figure 2.32b, and see *ibid.*, figs. 67, 71, 74, 79, and cover), the craftsmen fashioned half-palmettes from a series of graceful slots carved in high relief. The edges of the



2.28 Carved plaster from the dome in v18, as found collapsed on the floor (see 2.29)

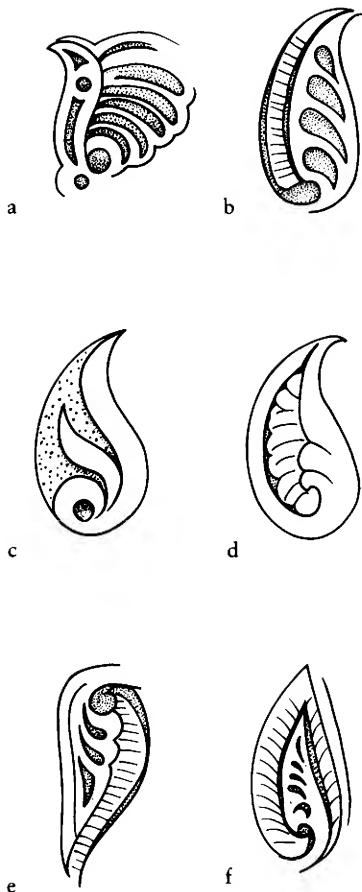
2.30 Fragments of carved plaster from the collapsed dome in v18 (see 2.31). Yellow-ocher paint on the borders



2.29 Fragments of carved plaster from the dome in v18. Height about 68 cm, width about 65 cm. Muzé Iran Bastan, Teheran

2.31 Fragment of carved plaster from the dome in v18. Restored. Height 79 cm, width 80 cm. The Metropolitan Museum of Art (40.170.440)





2.32

Leaf motifs from the carved plaster at (a and b) a Samanid palace at Afrasiyab, (c) Samarra, (d) the mosque of Ibn Tulun in Cairo, (e and f) Nishapur, Sabz Pushan (see 3.25, 3.31). Drawings by Charles K. Wilkinson and William Schenck

leaves are beveled and decorated with closely spaced indentations, or fringe. This technique is basic to the carved plaster decoration found at all the Nishapur sites except Tepe Madraseh, where the palmettes have fringed edges but no oblique cutting (see Figure 1.125). Several of the fragments retrieved from the Vineyard have leaves carved in this way. For purposes of comparison we show in Figure 2.32 drawings of leaves from cut plaster decoration discovered at other sites.

The traces of paint remaining on many of the fragments of carved plaster from the Vineyard indicate that the color scheme here was the same as that used on the carved decoration in other buildings of the same period at Nishapur: white, red, blue, and, for borders, yellow-ocher. On some of the fragments found in V18 the raised surfaces are emphasized by a pure white (or on occasion blue-gray) plaster wash that would have contrasted with the plaster on the flat wall surfaces above the dadoes, which due to impurities was grayish white. No white enhancement or color remains on the surface of most of the carving, but blue pigment, or occasionally red, remains in the cuts and hollows of the background on many pieces. A series of seven-petaled rosettes on a small piece from V23 has a red ground (Figure 2.27 top). On a fragment of a skillfully carved band from V7 traces of red and blue remain on the background and the broad bands are painted yellow (Figure 2.15).

The bright blue backgrounds are especially well preserved on the few fragments of inscription to survive (Figures 2.13, 2.27 bottom). A fragment from V23, on which but three letters remain, clearly came from the head of an archway, perhaps over a qibleh or a window (Figure 2.27 bottom). The spandrels below the band of inscription are filled with palmettes and pierced forms consistent with the decoration found elsewhere at the site. All of these scraps of lettering seem to be parts of *al-mulk Allah* (sovereignty is God's), the phrase repeated so many times in the inscriptions at Nishapur, whether carved in plaster or cut in brick or painted on walls or ceramics.

### WALL PAINTING

By their very nature such smooth, gleaming white walls would seem to invite graffiti, and in the Vineyard Tepe the invitation had been accepted by "artists" of varying degrees of aptitude. Unfortunately in no instance was there any precise indication of when the marks were made. Even the few inscriptions we found provided no clues. Would that the men who wrote words on walls in Nishapur had added their own names and the date, as did travelers to the Orient in our era, and would that they had mentioned temporal rulers rather than Allah, Lord of the Worlds.



2.33

(above left) Graffito of a horse and rider scratched on the southeast wall of the upper end of the alleyway (v13)

2.34

(above right) Inscription in Arabic and Farsi found in a room in the undug area under the road at the eastern edge of the Vineyard Tepe. Black paint on plaster. Height about 23.3 cm, width about 20 cm

2.35

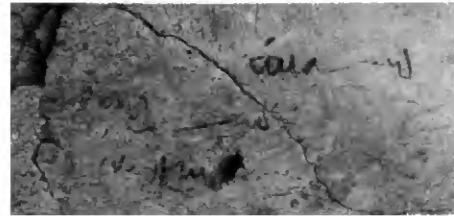
Sketches of camels scratched on the topmost layer of plaster on the southeast wall of v6. The four layers of plaster that had been applied to the wall are visible below the sketches

I have already referred to the rough drawing of a horse and rider cut into the plaster on the wall at the top end of the alleyway (Figure 2.33). Near the path running along the eastern edge of the mound we discovered, by chance, an inscription painted on plaster that read: *al-[rah]man al-rahim / al-hamd Allah / rihas mar khudai ra* (Figure 2.34). Annemarie Schimmel, consultant to the Metropolitan Museum's Department of Islamic Art, has kindly translated this as "the [merciful], the compassionate / praise be to God," written first in Arabic, then in Farsi. There is a little of a further line below. As the room from which this piece of plaster came was never excavated, we were unable to establish a direct link between this inscription and those discovered in v6, where the later layers of plaster had served as suitable surfaces for graffiti both scratched and drawn.

On the southeast wall in v6 crude sketches of camels, one carrying a man who holds his arms high above his head, were scratched into the topmost coat of plaster (Figure 2.35). On the next layer were short inscriptions

2.36

Inscriptions painted in black on the second layer of plaster on the south-east wall of v6



painted in black, only one of them still legible: at the top right in Figure 2.36 *bi'ism Allah* (in the name of God) can be made out. On the other walls the most recent plaster layers were in worse condition. In the north corner a large section of the upper portion of the wall, presumably shaken loose by earth tremors, had slid down and lay in a heap on the topmost floor level (Figure 2.37).

Thanks to the Iranians' distaste for scoring one surface before applying another, we were able to pick the many coats of plaster from the walls of v6. It was an arduous process, but we had our reward when we reached the second layer that had been applied to the northwest wall. In Figure 2.38, taken before the painstaking job of removing all superimposed plaster was completed, the splendid figure of the huntsman has already been exposed. Figure 2.39 shows the painting as it was finally revealed, a scene approximately 1.15 meters high stretching the entire length of the wall and obviously quite unlike the marks scribbled and scratched on the opposite wall at a later period. Tracings of the huntsman and what was left of a figure painted on the wall behind him appear in Figure 2.40.

2.37

North corner of v6, where a large chunk of wall seemed to have slid down from above, perhaps in an earthquake. Two more plaster floors existed below the level of the rubble



*The Hunting Scene*

Though they were sealed in by a succession of white plaster layers, the huntsman and his mount, the chief figures in the scene, were unscathed either by the construction of the partition dividing v6 and v7 or by natural disasters. Parts of the drawing were lost where, due to salt deposits, the plaster layers came away in chunks, impossible to separate, but the most serious damage had been deliberate. The man's features had been purposely obliterated; where his face should have been was a gaping hole filled in with plaster. The horse and rider were carefully removed from the wall and transferred to a sheet of linen (Figure 2.41). Realizing that so important a find should be preserved in Iran itself, we turned the painting over to the Iranian authorities, who transported it to the Teheran museum. Before putting the horseman on exhibition, the museum officials had his face restored, but as any reconstruction would have to have been based purely on conjecture, the work is open to question. Beneath the thin layer of white plaster on which the horseman was painted was one other splotchy coat, spread directly on the thick kahgil wall.

Only the top of the head and parts of the legs and feet remained of the figure standing behind the mounted hunter (to the right in Figure 2.39). This



2.38

Painting of the huntsman on the northwest wall of v6, before all the superimposed plaster had been removed



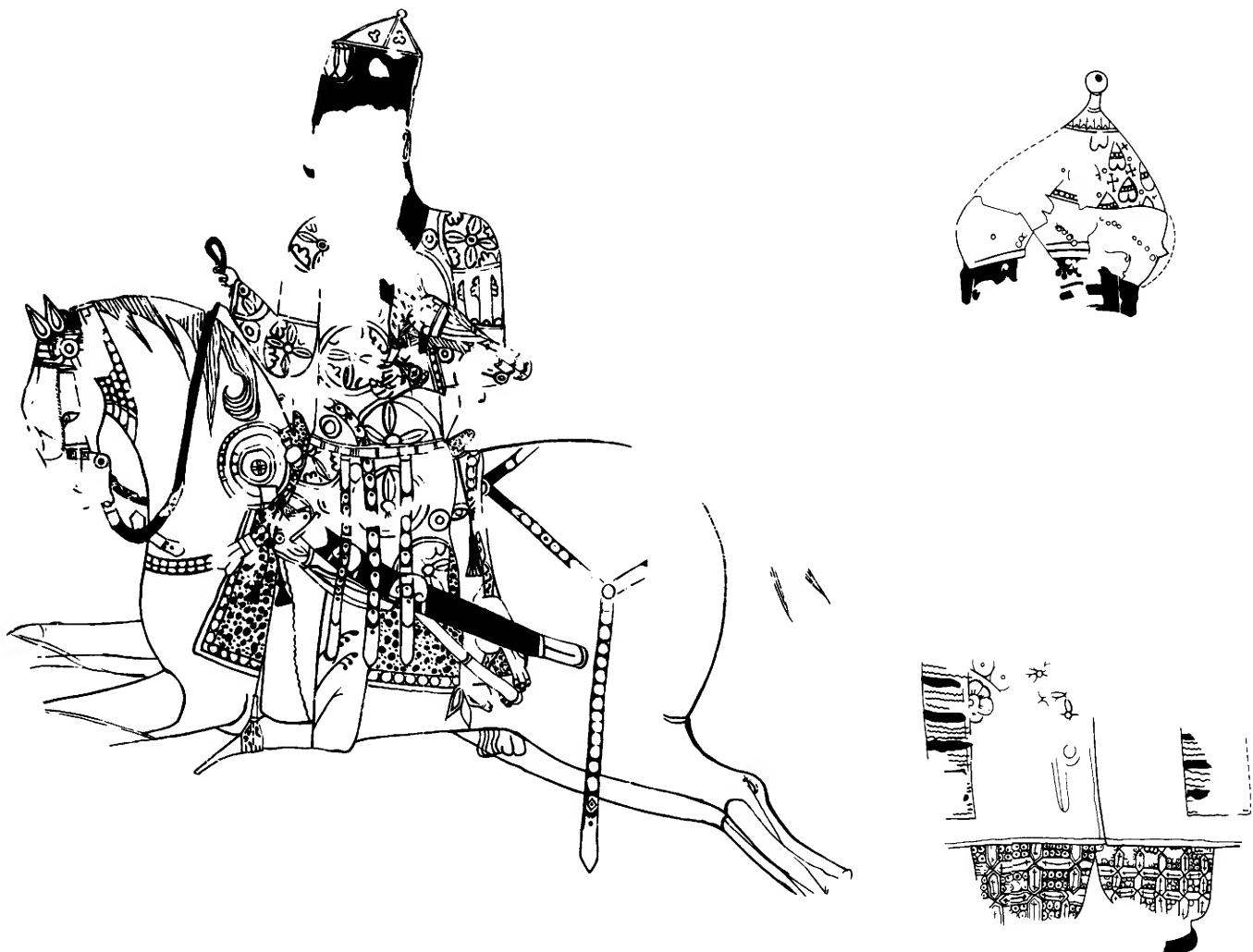
2.39

Hunting scene on the northwest wall of v6, fully revealed. Height of the painting about 1.15 m

man's face, too, had been deliberately destroyed, and some of the painting must have come away with the added plaster layers, but it also looked as though the plaster on this section of the wall had buckled and partially collapsed, perhaps during an earlier earthquake, causing the top part of the drawing to slip down the wall. It proved impossible to save this part of the painting.

We are unable to produce even a photograph of the rest of the scene, which extended in front of the horseman and behind the dividing wall between v6 and v7 (at the far left in Figure 2.39). When we dismantled the partition wing, the drawing it had obscured, of a frightened hare fleeing for its life from the hunter riding close at its heels, was very badly damaged.

**THE HUNTSMAN.** The drawing in Figure 2.40 replicates the huntsman as he appeared on the wall, eliminating all the confusing cracks in the plaster. The rider holds a falcon (probably hooded) on his gloved left hand, close to his chest. He wears a peaked headdress topped with a spherical knob. A bold design of roundels enclosing four-petaled rosettes patterns his tunic, which is



probably silk, and sprigs of embroidery embellish his trousers, which graze the instep in front and cover the heel in back. Brassards, the left one still bearing its decoration of pseudolettering, encircle his upper arms. His belt has three dangling straps, doubtless of leather encrusted with metal ornaments. From the belt hang two swords: one, in a leather scabbard, large and curved, the other thinner and more delicate. The galloping steed, resplendent in a leopard-skin saddlecloth and metal-studded harness, its swelling contours and taut muscles defined by a strong, modulated line, is so well drawn it seems actually to be surging forward. Like the plump hare swinging limply from the saddle and the falcon poised for flight on its master's glove, the horse is rendered much more sensitively and realistically than the human figure, who sits rather stiffly upright.

The falconer's rich attire and his well-bred mount with its fine trappings, as well as the tip of black mustache that remains to indicate he was bearded, denote a man of high rank. The wanton defacement of the figure erased any chance we might have had of identifying the subject of what was surely a royal portrait, for the painting bore no inscription. To deepen the

2.40

Tracing of the huntsman (done in the field by Charles K. Wilkinson) and of the few preserved details of the figure to the right (done from the photograph by William Schenck)

enigma, no other mural like this has been found in Iran; not only the subject and composition but several of the details are unique.

Depictions of mounted hunters do appear in several other mediums in Asia and the Middle East, where hunting has long been a favorite subject of artists. Comparing our picture with other hunting scenes may help to dispel some of its mystery. Three examples are reproduced here (Figures 2.44-46): a glazed buff ware bowl retrieved from area T1 in Tepe Madraseh, a silk textile from Rayy, and a ceramic plate from Egypt.

In Iran, the popularity of hunting on horseback with either a falcon or, like the hunter on the Nishapur bowl, a cheetah, can be traced to the last half of the seventh century, soon after the arrival of the Muslim Arab invaders who defeated the last of the Sasanian kings. The sport was deemed a

#### 2.41

Painting of the huntsman after it had been transferred to a sheet of canvas to be transported to Teheran

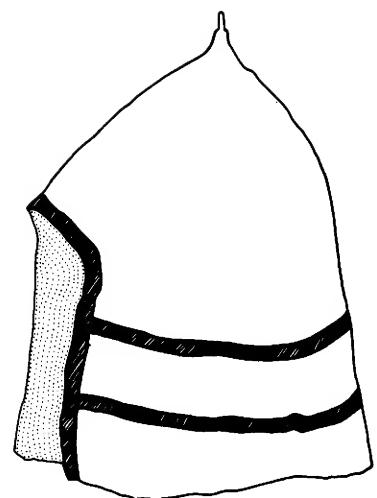


highly suitable pastime for rulers. Kai Ka'us ibn Iskandar, prince of Gurgan, describes royal hunts in the *Qabus-nama* (A mirror for princes), which he wrote in 1082, not long after this scene must have been painted on the wall at Nishapur. He even specifically mentions Khurasan, where, it seems, some of the princes had adopted the Iraqi custom of flying the hawk from their own hand, rather than letting a servant handle the bird. Like the mounted hunters depicted on the Cairo plate and the Rayy textile, as well as on a silver medal from Nishapur that Mehdi Bahrami ("Gold Medal," pl. 1, fig. 4) has dated to the ninth century, our rider flies his own falcon. The position of his arm, however, is unusual; on all other depictions of falconers that I know of, the hunter holds his bird on an outstretched arm, well away from his body.

The mounted hunters depicted in Abbasid period art may wear turbans, crowns, winged helmets, or no headgear at all; in none of the representations, no matter what the medium, is a rider equipped with anything like our huntsman's headdress, the most extraordinary item of his sumptuous garb. Although judging from the position of his left ear and of the upturned mustache tip the man's face would seem to have been shown in three-quarter view, the headdress can only be understood in profile. It appears to be twisted to his right and to be perched on top of his head. The ornamental top section, decorated with trefoils and surmounted by a spherical knob, may be made of silk; that the lower portion is painted black like the scabbard and harness may mean it is intended to be leather. To the left, at the front of the helmet, two long, dangling ornaments hang suspended in what appears to be a rectangular opening. A white line carefully scratched into the black paint outlines the helmet and echoes the limits of the opening, if such it be, and close examination reveals that just to the left of the white patch where the paint is missing is another white arc, also scratched with great care.

The one link the helmet provides to the early Islamic world hints that our anonymous ruler, conqueror, or governor engaged in the noble sport of falconry may have come from east of Nishapur. The definite backward tilt to the conical top bears a marked similarity to a headpiece dating to the seventh or eighth century that was excavated at Balkh and is now in the Hermitage Museum, Leningrad (Figure 2.42). Like our rider's, the Balkh helmet was meant to fit close to the head and to cover the brow and the sides and back of the neck, but there the resemblance ends, for it is made entirely of silk, and the square opening at the front leaves the face exposed.

An even closer approximation of the Nishapur helmet was made in great antiquity, much farther to the east. From the excavations of the royal tombs at An-yang, the ancient capital of the Shang dynasty, in east central China, comes a bronze burial helmet with an almost identical conical top,



2.42

Silk helmet from Balkh. 7th–9th century. The Hermitage Museum, Leningrad. Drawing by William Schenck, after Ierusalimskaya, "Slozeniyu shkoly," p. 30, fig. 17



2.43

Silver helmet from Rumania. Thracian, 4th century B.C. Height 24 cm, width 18 cm. The Detroit Institute of Arts, Purchase, Sarah Hill Bacon Fund (56.18). Photograph courtesy of The Detroit Institute of Arts

complete with seamlike lines radiating from a central ornament, in this case a stalk instead of a knob. False eyes are embedded in the panel on the front of this funerary object, suggesting that this type of helmet was pulled down over the face, fitting close to the skull and leaving only the mouth and chin unprotected.

Paul Pelliot used the An-yang headpiece to illustrate a talk he gave at a 1937 Harvard colloquium entitled *Independence, Convergence, and Borrowing* (Pelliot, "Royal Tombs," fig. 2). The colloquium's title is relevant to this discussion as well. Except for its higher, rounded crown, a silver burial helmet from Rumania repeats the general shape and appearance of both the An-yang helmet and the one in the Nishapur painting, and it has a rectangular front panel—roughly the shape of the aperture containing the danglers on our huntsman's headgear—on which staring eyes and elaborate, swirling eyebrows have been engraved (Figure 2.43).

In his 1963 article marking the addition of this exquisite silver piece to the collection of the Detroit Institute of Arts, Bernard Goldman traces the helmet to classical prototypes: the Hellenistic helmets worn by the armies of Alexander the Great (Goldman, "Scythian Helmet," especially pp. 67, 69–71). In 335 B.C. Alexander marched across the Danube and up into the great plain of Wallachia, where the Detroit helmet, which Goldman dates to about 300 B.C., was purportedly found. According to Goldman, the helmet's decoration, though predominately Scythian, incorporates design elements from Greek, Hellenistic, and Persian art. By strange coincidence, the smith who fashioned the helmet from a single sheet of silver for a prince's burial mound has used large quatrefoil rosettes much like those on the Nishapur horseman's tunic, borrowing a motif from Greeks who had in turn learned it from Persian artists. Goldman also cites a solid gold Scythian helmet of similar form and design, dating to the late fourth century B.C., that is now in the Archaeological Institute of the Academy, Bucharest.

Although the connection cannot be too closely pinpointed, the Nishapur hunter's headdress therefore seems to be a late survival of a long tradition in the design of military headgear. Why the hunter would be wearing such a helmet, precisely how it functioned, and what the danglerlike attachments at the front actually represent all remain questions. Unfortunately we shall never know how good this artist was at achieving an accurate representation, or to what extent he substituted the products of his imagination for plain statements of fact.

The black area descending from just below the rider's left ear is hard to understand. It is possible, but not likely, that he wears chain mail under his gay silk tunic. Such armor was used in late Sasanian times; a king, probably

Khusrau II (r. 591–628), depicted in a bas-relief at Taq-i Bustan definitely wears chain mail (Porada, *Art of Ancient Iran*, pl. 56).

Our huntsman wears wide brassards adorned with tall, slender simulated Kufic characters with foliated verticals. All three of the other examples of horsemen pictured here lack brassards, but we know Iranians used armbands at least as early as the ninth century. The Persians in the wall paintings at Bezeklik, on the western border of China, are shown with armbands, though theirs are narrower and decorated only with simple lines close to the edges (Le Coq, *Auf Hellas Spuren*, pl. 20). A medal inscribed with the year 975 and showing an effigy of the Buyid prince 'Izz al-Dawla is among the earliest dated representations of a figure with brassards from Iran itself (Bahrami, "Gold Medal," pl. 1, fig. 3, from the plaster cast of the medal in the British Museum).

The extremely wide trousers, or riding chaps, worn by the Nishapur horseman follow an old style in Iran. What the wavy line drawn from the crotch to the knee represents, and whether it is functional or decorative, is unclear. This may be a survival of the fluttering outline of Sasanian trousers such as those shown on a silver plate depicting Shapur II (r. 309–79) that is now in the Hermitage Museum (Pope, *Survey* 4, pl. 210). A much later rendering of this style of trousers is seen in a plaque, probably from the very end of the Sasanian era (early seventh century), that was found in a palace at Chal Tarkhan-Eshqabad, near Rayy, and is now in the Philadelphia Museum of Art (Pope, *Survey* 4, pl. 176c). A knowledge of the earlier and clearer form is necessary, however, to realize that the undulating line on the plaque is not a boot.

A prominent feature of our rider's equipment is his belt with its three long straps, quite obviously, like the horse's harness, meant to be leather with metal adornments and tags at the ends. Several such metal tags were found in the Nishapur excavations (Allan, *Nishapur: Metalwork*, pp. 60–62). The use of metal tags on leather harnesses goes back to Sasanian times and later apparently spread as far west as Egypt, which is not surprising considering the breadth of the Sasanian empire. A foot soldier depicted in an Egyptian drawing that Gaston Wiet (*Exhibition of Islamic Art*, no. 49) attributes to the late tenth century wears a belt resembling our huntsman's, with similar dangling straps and metal ornaments. A sword in a scabbard hangs from the soldier's belt, and he carries a spear as well. He wears a patterned tunic, Persian trousers, and brassards decorated with lettering.

Our huntsman, bearing a falcon and so clearly seeking only the timid hare as his game, is formidably armed. The heavy sword attached to the straps on his belt by means of two roughly semicircular metal fittings on the



2.44

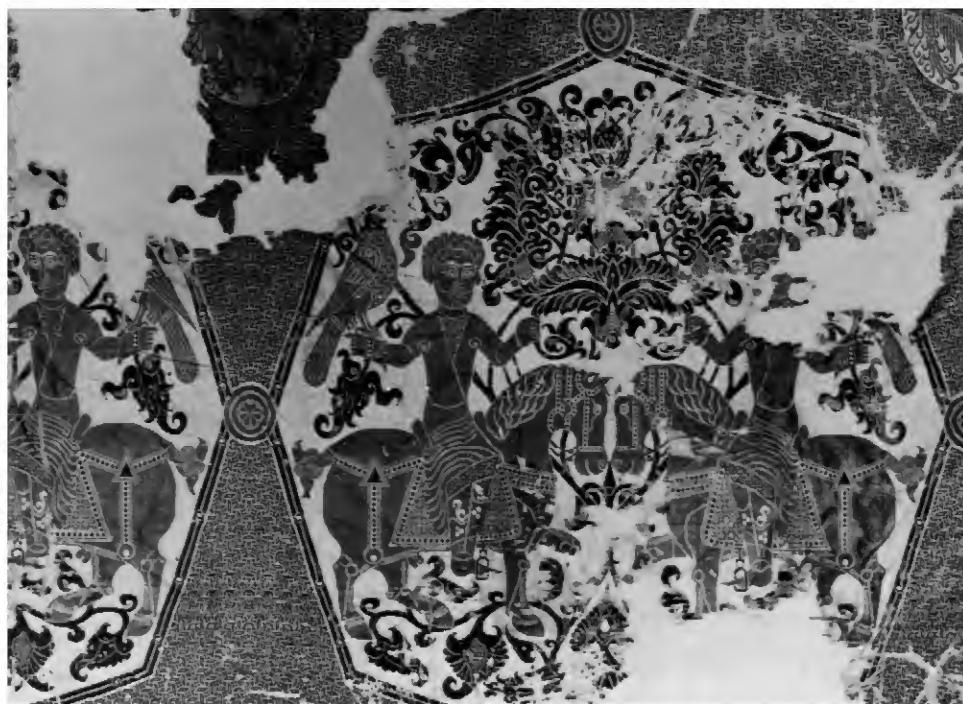
Glazed buff ware bowl from a low level of Tepe Madraseh, T1. Reddish buff body, bone-colored surface, design in black, yellow, and green on a yellow ground. Height 11.2 cm, diameter 38 cm. Muzé Iran Bastan, Teheran. See also Wilkinson, *Nishapur: Pottery*, pp. 20–22, no. 62

scabbard would seem better suited to subduing larger prey. The sword has a slightly curved blade (Sasanian swords, like the one the rider brandishes in the scene on the Nishapur bowl shown in Figure 2.44, had straight blades), and its handle ends in a more or less lozenge-shaped pommel. The two tassels hanging near the belt are probably part of the horse's fittings, and not an ornament on the scabbard, for there is another tassel suspended from the rear of the saddle.

Oddly enough, it seems that one sword did not suffice for this intrepid hunter. In front of the dead hare, passing behind the large sword, is another scabbard, not painted black and so perhaps made of metal. The thinner, much more elegant blade also has a slight curve. If one follows the curve upward, between the pommel of the saddle and the circular boss on the horse's neck one can see what appears to be a knob in the form of a pomegranate that may be the pommel of this delicate sword. The bottom end of the scabbard is similar to the tip of a thin scabbard carried by a rider in a painting at Afrasiyab (Albaum, *Zhivopis' Afrasiaba*, p. 49, fig. 13).

Although the bearing of two swords might seem remarkable, supplementing a substantial weapon with a narrower, shorter one was apparently not uncommon. In paintings at Afrasiyab and at Piandzhikent there are figures armed with two such weapons (see *ibid.*, fig. 12, pl. XXVII; Belenitskiy, "Voprosy ideologii," pl. VII).

The horse and its trappings are also worthy of study. The Nishapur artist has convincingly depicted the huntsman's horse in a version of the



2.45

Detail of a textile from Rayy, 11th century. Silk with a repeat design. Height 36 cm. Abegg-Stiftung Bern (1143). Photograph courtesy of Abegg-Stiftung Bern

"flying gallop," a convention popular with Sasanian artists, who portrayed it with varying degrees of vitality. An excellent example is seen on a silver plate now in the Metropolitan Museum (34.33; see Dimand, *Handbook*, fig. 9, and Harper, *Royal Hunter*, p. 40, no. 7). The Vineyard painting is unusual, however, in representing a falconer mounted on a steed at a flying gallop.

All but two strands of our horse's tail are missing, but we can infer that it was tied up in the practical manner practiced in Iran from the Achaemenid period (sixth century B.C.) onward. In Sasanian times horses' tails were often tied in elaborate artistic arrangements.

In the Parthian era (250 B.C.–A.D. 224) large rosettes like the one forward of the saddle in the Vineyard painting were extraordinarily fashionable (Seyrig, "Armes et costumes," pl. III, fig. 1). Later these distinctive ornaments were supplanted by smaller, less obvious bosses. The saddle itself is peaked in both back and front, unlike the Sasanian type, which had a cantle only. The change can be seen on a post-Sasanian silver plate in the Hermitage Museum that may date to the ninth century (Pope, *Survey* 4, pl. 218). The horse in the scene on that plate has a saddle with two peaks.

The saddlecloth on the Vineyard horse, of leopard skin with a pearl border, is no different in shape from many a one of the pre-Islamic period, but the harnessing is altogether different. In Sasanian times the harness consisted of a broad horizontal band passing from one side of the animal to the other beneath the tail. Here the straps, all loaded with metal ornaments, are narrower and more complicated. From a ring at the back of the saddle one strap passes over the horse's back and a second descends to the ring at the side. From the ring another strap passes around the rump to a corresponding ring on the other side. In addition, a long ornamental strap terminating in a metal tab hangs from the ring. Rings like these were retrieved from the ruins at Nishapur: one, shaped like a trefoil, would have been ideal for use on this type of harness (Allan, *Nishapur: Metalwork*, p. 91, no. 131).

The elaborate harnessing shown so clearly in the Nishapur painting reappears on a medallion from Termez in Uzbekistan. The medallion, which G. A. Pugachenkova and L. I. Rempel (*Istoriya iskusstva Uzbekistana*, fig. 220) date to the twelfth century, shows a rider, his head encircled by a halo, holding a falcon on his outstretched arm and riding a horse depicted with one raised foreleg. The harnessing is also similar on the Nishapur medal (Bahrami, "Gold Medal," pl. 1, fig. 4), but the ornamental hanging strap is shorter, as it is on a well-known post-Sasanian plate (showing the siege of a castle), now in the Hermitage Museum, that has been attributed to the ninth or tenth century by V. P. Darkevich and Boris I. Marshak ("Nazvaemom Siriyskom blyude"; see also Pope, *Survey* 4, pl. 233b).

The horse on the silk textile from the vicinity of Rayy (Figure 2.45),



2.46

Plate from Egypt. Fatimid, 12th century. Ceramic with yellow golden luster painting. Height 7 cm, diameter 38.3 cm. Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C. (41.12). Photograph courtesy of the Freer Gallery of Art

despite its two lifted feet, looks so stationary as to appear stuffed. The harness has a hanging strap, but it is attached not to a ring but to a triangular metal fitting, and it ends not with a rectangular tab but with a crescent-shaped ornament. No such objects were found in the Nishapur excavations. The Rayy artist may have used his imagination for the fittings just as he has done for the horse's reins, which hover in midair near the rider's forearm while he firmly grasps a curling decorative branch.

A squared stirrup forms part of the trappings on the Rayy horse. Our horseman rests his very pointed boot (if he is indeed wearing a boot) in a stirrup so small it may be simply a ring. The rider hunting with a cheetah on the Nishapur bowl (Figure 2.44) definitely wears high leather leggings and does have a ring stirrup, but his general appearance and his accoutrements differ greatly from the Vineyard hunter's in most other respects, and the method of expression could hardly be more different.

**THE FIGURE BEHIND THE HUNTSMAN.** The relationship between the huntsman and the figure standing behind him is not at all clear (see Figure 2.39). The second figure was in such poor condition and so little of the drawing remained that it is difficult even to speculate what his role might have been. Not only was the figure incomplete, but the layers of plaster had overlapped so that the head slipped down the wall toward what was left of the legs and feet. At first glance one might think the figure is meant to be an attendant in the chase, but then one notices the man's very large head, which seems not only out of proportion with his own tiny feet but out of scale with the hunter, even allowing for the hunter's seated pose. Furthermore, enough of the area around the face and neck remained to show that the figure does not carry anything—which would surely be unusual were he an attendant.

In the tracing (Figure 2.40) the few details that were preserved are somewhat easier to see. What was left of the luxurious headgear shows that it is an essentially conical cap topped by what could be a metal cylinder surmounted by a knob. Like the horseman's headdress, the cap cantsl slightly to the back, with a gentler slope on the front, at the left. Just below the cylinder a decorative band of simulated Kufic encircles the headpiece, and below that is a pattern of heart-shaped petals, each crossed by a narrow band of circles, against a background filled with small decorative details—circles, swastikas, and crosses.

This headpiece is probably made from finely woven silk. A piece of such silk decorated with the same heart motifs is now in the Musée du Louvre, Paris (Pope, *Survey* 4, pl. 201b). And garments made of this fabric are depicted in the sixth-century wall paintings discovered at Balalyk Tepe in Uzbekistan (Pugachenkova and Rempel, *Istoriya iskusstva Uzbekistana*, fig.

112). The heart motif was of course used almost universally in Perso-Roman decorative arts, but in Khurasan it seems to have enjoyed even greater popularity, until at least the end of the tenth century. The motif appears in the glazed ceramics retrieved from Nishapur (see, for example, Wilkinson, *Nishapur: Pottery*, p. 133, no. 6).

Beneath the area of patterned fabric is a band painted not white or black, like every other area of the painting, but a definite gray. The artist may have meant it to be colored cloth, although it is not long enough for a turban. A fringe of black hair arranged in curls survived below the headdress. Rows of curls on males are not unknown in the early Islamic art of Nishapur; see, for instance, the horseman depicted on the yellow buff ware bowl from Tepe Madraseh (Figure 2.44).

Part of the figure's strongly marked left eyebrow was preserved, as was the eyelid beneath it, but the face was hopelessly wrecked by many holes filled with coats of plaster that could not be removed. The damage extended to the entire upper part of the body. Separating what was painting and what were cracks and damage in the plaster is difficult, but as the drawing clearly shows, part of the figure's tunic, descending to well below his knees, still remains. Over the garment, which seems either to have a vertical seam or to overlap at the center front, hang the ends of what appears to be a stole decorated with wavy horizontal stripes. The tunic itself is not entirely plain; part of a six-petaled rosette emerges from under the left end of the stole, and to the right are a few traces of a series of simple quatrefoil rosettes. Just above the hem, to the left of center, there appears what looks like the rounded end of a slender wand.

The painting on the tunic has an unfinished look about it. Below the hem, however, the artist seems to have taken great pleasure in drawing the very elaborate pattern on the trousers, a checkerboard on which dotted circles alternate with elongated lozenges filled with lines hatched with a short stroke on each end. Below the trousers just enough of one shoe remained to show that the feet pointed to the left, so that the figure faced the same direction as the hunter and his mount.

Examples of trousers in very much the same spirit, gathered at the ankles and even with similar patterns on the fabric, abound in Iranian art. A figure on a plastered and painted pottery jar from Samarra wears trousers of this type, though in material patterned with variegated spots. (In other paintings at Samarra there are textiles that are very much like the fabric on the Nishapur figure's trousers; see Herzfeld, *Samarra* 3, pls. LXX, XXIV.) Ernst Herzfeld suggests that the figure on the jar, which according to him was used as a statue (*Bildsäule*), is a female, and that the scene illustrates the story of Azade eating a calf (which gave her the strength to lift an ox). It is more



2.47

Drawings removed from the wall behind the southeast wing of the partition between v6 and v7. Black paint on plaster. Height of lion about 22.5 cm. The Metropolitan Museum of Art (40.170.243)

likely, however, as J. Sauvaget and David S. Rice maintain, that the figure on the jar is a young, beardless hunter (Rice, "Deacon or Drink," p. 18, pl. IV). He wears a belt with dangling straps like some that were found at Lashkari Bazar (Schlumberger, "Lashkari Bazar").

### *Sketches on the Southeast Wall of V6*

Further paintings in black outline were discovered when the several layers of white plaster were removed from the opposite wall, on the southeast side of the room, where the topmost coats had been covered with graffiti. The paintings on the earlier layers, most of them merely sketches, bore no resemblance either to each other or to the hunting scene painted at the same time on the facing wall. Nonetheless, it is at least possible that they were drawn by the same hand. In the one sketch that shows true artistic merit—a drawing of a lioness with her tail twisted around her left hind leg (Figure 2.47)—we see the skill and sensitivity of the man who drew the horse and the hares, the same subtlety of line. The winding tail recalls the pose of the animal, slimmer than this one and not a lioness but also with a curl on its shoulder, on a beautiful silver plate of the ninth to tenth century that is now in the Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris (Sarre, *Kunst des alten Persien*, pl. 123; pl. 122, another late or post-Samanid plate, does show a lioness, but the draftsmanship is not so fine).

The lioness in v6, like the fleeing hare opposite, had been obscured beneath the partition wall, but in this case we were able to preserve the painting when the partition wing was pulled away from the wall it abutted. All of the drawings shown in Figure 2.47 were incorporated into a plaster panel that was allotted to The Metropolitan Museum of Art.

In Figure 2.47 one can see that a decorative device and a man's head had been sketched on the wall just above the lioness. The ornament, two half-palmettes joined so that one faces upward and the other down, was used by the potters of Nishapur, as can be seen on a complete buff ware bowl found at the Village Tepe, not far from the Vineyard (Metropolitan Museum of Art 38.40.272; see Wilkinson, *Nishapur: Pottery*, p. 13, no. 37). The device was known outside of Nishapur as well, for it appears on a tenth-century monochrome lusterware bowl reputedly from Rayy that was once in the Kann Collection (Pézard, *Céramique archaïque*, pl. CXIV; Pope, *Survey* 5, pl. 577). Another luster bowl, also dated to the ninth century, now in the British Museum (1968.10-15), has a similar device repeated six times. And the motif also appears in a ninth-century house at Samarra (Herzfeld, *Samarra* 3, haus XVI, pl. LII). The drawing of the man's head is without distinction. Shown in profile, which accentuates his rather pointed nose, the



2.48

Small drawings from the left side of the southeast wall of v6, facing the huntsman. Black paint on plaster. Diameter of the circle on the right about 9 cm

man wears his beard trimmed to the jaw, and his hair descends to below his ear.

Other small drawings were revealed when we cleared the wall to the left of the partition of its many plaster coats (Figure 2.48). Among them is another sketchy drawing of a man's head, this time in three-quarter view. Only the face is depicted; there is no indication of hair beyond the one eyebrow above a narrow eye, which looks very much to the side. Immediately to the right, obviously in no way related, is a fairly spirited drawing of a horse's head in profile. To the left of the man is a small quatrefoil composed of a ribbon, and to the far right is a more elaborate version of the same device enclosed in a circle, with a spot of red at its center—the only bit of color to be seen anywhere in the room. This larger quatrefoil bears a superficial resemblance to a Coptic roundel, but this may not be significant, as the motif was used all over the Near East, in Armenian as well as Coptic textiles and manuscripts. Its appearance here bears witness to the widespread use of certain decorative designs. The short Kufic inscription below these random sketches reads simply, *bi'ism Allah* (in the name of God).

### Conclusion

These inscriptions and sketches make the painting in v6 yet more mysterious and raise a number of questions. Why was the artist painting a fine scene on one wall and not the other? Why did he limit himself to black and white—save for a single, isolated red dot? Because they extended behind the two wings of the screening wall, there is no doubt that the paintings were contemporary and that they were made, but not completed, before the room was

divided. Why then was there no trace of painting extant behind the carved plaster decoration that fell from the long walls that v7 shared with v6?

One set of conjectures seems almost a certainty: some person of rank commissioned murals for an important room, and soon after the artist began the plan changed abruptly. The work may have been halted at the whim of this same patron. If he was a governor or some other official in Nishapur, however, and that is by no means improbable, it is equally likely that the change in the room was the result of the fortunes of war. Such important buildings were often reused by the successful party. Whoever this new man was, he preferred carved plaster decoration to painting and had the means and the time to have the work done to please his own taste. In any case, he would not very well have wanted to keep a representation of his rival on the wall. Perhaps he went so far as to have the face, and thus the identity, of the man he had defeated obliterated before he ordered the entire painting covered with coats of whitewash.

That we have no positive evidence of the identity of the huntsman whose portrait was so hurriedly obliterated is most unfortunate. He was probably associated with the initial building on this particular site, so little of which could be cleared. The structures in the tepe were used for perhaps two centuries or so before they were devastated by earthquakes and, later, dug up and converted to a vineyard. The number of candidates for the subject of this painting is therefore formidable, as can be seen by a glance at the list of governors of Nishapur given by E. de Zambaur in his *Manuel de généalogie et de chronologie pour l'histoire de l'Islam* (pp. 48–49). The fourteen coins found in the Vineyard Tepe, the earliest three of the late eighth century and the latest seven of the early tenth century, are not particularly helpful, but all other evidence seems to suggest the tenth century as the last possible date of our huntsman's living and defeat. He could have been a Samanid. This would not exclude 'Abdallah ibn Tahir, who governed Khurasan from 828 to 845 and made Nishapur his capital, building his palace at Shadyakh, outside the early city. But the identity of our rider must, in the end, remain a mystery.

## Chapter 3

# SABZ PUSHAN



### 3.1

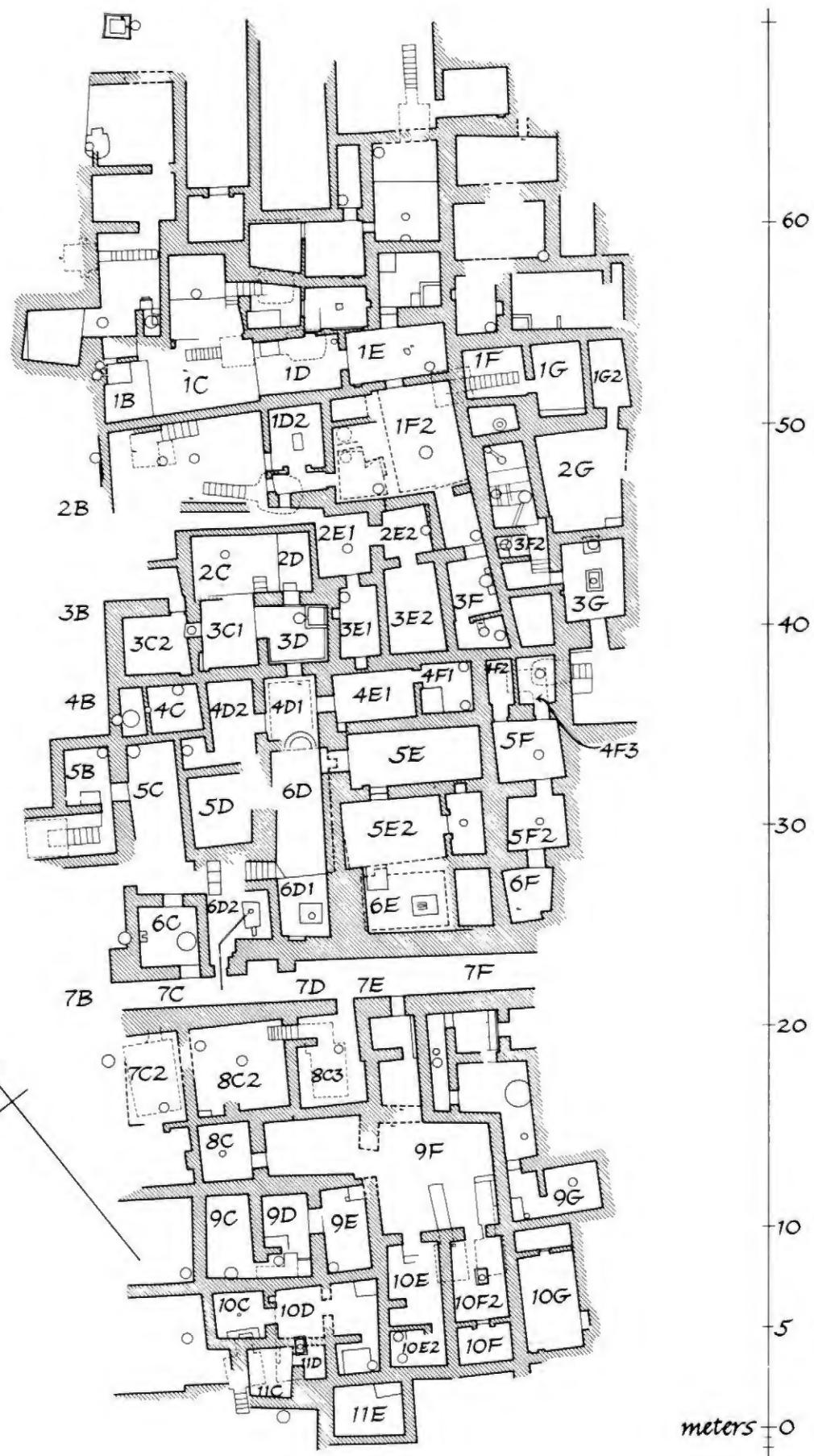
Sabz Pushan before it was excavated, looking south, 1935. The dome of the shrine of Muhammad Mahruq breaks the horizon to the left

SABZ PUSHAN, or Tepe Sabz Pushan (Green-covered Mound, although its green was barely noticeable), as it was known locally, was the first site to be cleared at Nishapur. The low mound rose above the general level of the cultivation near a road leading to the domed shrine of Muhammad Mahruq, about 3 kilometers from the modern town (Figure 3.1). It had been broached in 1935 by peasants seeking to use its fertile soil for their fields, but the local representative of the Ministry of Education (who was not only superintendent of schools but also guardian of the *waqf*, or pious foundations, and antiquities) stopped the work after peasants had pulled out several pieces of carved plaster palmettes and bared the ends of the plastered walls. This preliminary revelation of elaborate wall decoration and the immediate discovery of glazed earthenware of fine quality rendered any further sondage unnecessary. We began systematic excavation at once (Figures 3.2–3.4), and operations continued throughout three seasons. To comply with Iranian law, the excavated area was then refilled.

The buildings in Sabz Pushan (Figure 3.5) were on less grand a scale than those in both the Vineyard Tepe and Tepe Madraseh. The rooms were smaller, some no more than 3 meters square, and the walls less massive. The houses were arranged close together, and most of them had small interior courtyards. A narrow kucheh, or alleyway, ran through the dwellings in the excavated area (Figure 3.6).

# Sabz Pushan

1:300





## 3.2

Sabz Pushan looking north at the start of the excavations in 1935. A mound called Tepe Ahangiran stands to the right

Most of the coins retrieved from Sabz Pushan—376 in all, none in a hoard—were of the eighth to the tenth century. Of the total, 90 were in too poor condition to be identified; the remaining 286 were tabulated by Joseph M. Upton:

Parthian (312 B.C.—A.D. 77)	1
Sasanian (3rd—7th century)	3
1st half 8th century	12
2nd half 8th century	118
8th/9th century	24
Abbasid type (9th/10th century)	102
Seljuq (11th/12th century)	3
Tekish (late 12th century)	8
Il Khan (13th/14th century)	3
Post-Il Khan, including modern	12

The four pre-Islamic coins can be ignored. Many of the earliest coins were not found at the lowest levels, indicating that Islamic coins remained in circulation for a very long time. Despite the presence of a few coins dating to the fourteenth century and even later, the absence of alkaline-glazed pottery, except for a few stray sherds, at the site showed clearly that Sabz Pushan was, for the most part at any rate, abandoned by the twelfth century. It is quite possible that it did not recover either after the earthquake of 1145 or after the destruction of the city by the Ghuzz Turks in 1153.

The rooms at Sabz Pushan had often been changed. Many of the changes were hard to explain, but some of the rebuilding had obviously been necessary to repair damage from local disasters (though not from fire; in the whole of the tepe not one room showed signs of fire damage). Apart from general renovations of the white plaster floors, alterations had been made, with slight changes of level, when fireplaces or sinkaways were added or obliterated.

3.3

Sabz Pushan looking southwest in 1935, after the mound had been breached by peasants to reveal the top of a panel of carved plaster decoration (see 3.4)



3.4

Iwan (3C1) in Sabz Pushan during clearing, when the carved plaster dadoes had been partially exposed (see 3.20)



3.5

Excavated rooms in Sabz Pushan, looking east over 10D and 9F, a large courtyard



Many of the rooms had a fireplace, a raised rectangular curb or molding in the middle of the floor (Figure 3.7). In the center of the rectangle was a sunken pot, broken at the bottom to allow the insertion of an earthenware pipe composed of tapering sections (Figures 3.8, 3.9). A charcoal fire would have been built in the pot; air forced down the pipe with a fan (which, if the methods employed in modern Iranian kitchens can be any guide, might have been the wing of a fowl) would have provided oxygen to keep the charcoal hot and glowing. In winter the fire would have served as a source of heat for the traditional Iranian *kursi*, a wooden frame placed over the fire and covered by cotton quilts, under which several people can warm their legs. Although these rooms were not really kitchens, the fireplace could have functioned not only as a built-in brazier but also, with a pair of notched stone animals placed on either side to hold a spit, as a means of grilling food (Figure 3.10). Even the elaborately decorated braziers of the late thirteenth century in Egypt fulfilled this double function (see Wilkinson, "Heating and Cooking in Nishapur").

Sunk into the plaster floors in some rooms were large earthenware jugs that at one time must have been filled with grain or like provisions (Figures 3.11 and 3.12, which shows a smaller jar discovered with its lid). The use of sunken storage jars has a long history in Iran; they are still being used in the modern town of Nishapur. In one of the houses we discovered a winepress in the corner of a room (Figure 3.13).

Several of the rooms, even if of no great size, were furnished with a mihrab (which at Sabz Pushan was always built near a corner), appropriately

### 3.6

Kucheh, or alleyway (7C-F), looking northwest. The entrance to 5D, a zir-i-zamin (see 3.14-3.16), is to the right in the middle ground





3.7

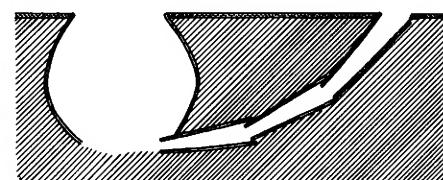
(left) Hearth in 3E2, looking south

3.8

(below left) Second level of 5C, with the charcoal container and the air-duct of the hearth partially exposed. The duct to the right belongs to an earlier fireplace

3.9

(below) Section of a Sabz Pushan fireplace, showing the sunken container for charcoal and the airduct leading from it. Drawing by Charles K. Wilkinson



3.10

(above) Double-headed "horse" support for a spit from Nishapur, exact provenance unknown. Carved gray stone. Height about 10.5 cm, width about 15.7 cm





3.11

Sunken earthenware storage jars in 3F

3.12

Earthenware storage jars in 5F. The lid of the jar in the foreground was flush with the topmost plaster floor



3.13

Winepress in a kitchen area in Sabz Pushan. The broken pot to the right holds bones

3.14

(*opposite left*) Workmen clearing the large zir-i-zamin (6D)

3.15

(*opposite right*) Zir-i-zamin (6D) with an apse in its northeast wall. The intrusive chineh wall to the right rests on a course of baked brick built on the rubble of destroyed buildings

oriented to face Mecca. All but one of the mihrabs were flanked by engaged columns. Only two of them, the mihrab with a single column and another, with two columns, in the adjoining room, had been decorated (see Figures 3.22, 3.30).

The walls, floors, and mihrabs in the rooms that served as living quarters were all covered with a thin layer of white plaster. The austerity of the white would have been broken only by colorful woven mats and rugs. Nonetheless, signs of comfortable living, even affluence, were not lacking at Sabz Pushan. In addition to the coins, we retrieved an abundance of fine glazed ceramics. And some of the rooms had been decorated with wall paintings and carved plaster dadoes.

## BRICKWORK

Decorative brickwork was found in only one place at Sabz Pushan, in a zir-i-zamin (6D). Cellars (indicated by dotted lines on the plan) were common in Sabz Pushan, but this underground chamber demands particular attention both because of its size and because it was furnished with brick vaulting and a semicircular apse of ajur laid in a zigzag pattern (Figures 3.14–3.16). Outstanding examples of this type of bricklaying are still to be seen at Sangbast in the mausoleum of Arslan Jadhib, dating to 1028, and in the eleventh- or twelfth-century mausoleum at Qal'ah-i Bust, a ruin field of the ancient city of Bust, in Afghanistan (Hill and Grabar, *Islamic Architecture*, pls. 160, 169, 170; Scherr-Thoss, *Design and Color*, pls. 2, 3; Stronach, "Three Seljuq Towers," pl. 6).

The apse, with its large square tiling, seemed to have been built above the floor level. It was on the central axis of the original chamber but of narrower width. At a later period the area was completely disrupted when a chineh wall, which overlapped the original wall to the right of the apse, was built on a new foundation of a single layer of baked bricks each measuring 25 by 25 by 6 centimeters.

In the original floor near the foot of the stairs was a sinkaway, which can be seen at the bottom right in Figure 3.15. The sinkaway produced nothing of archaeological interest, but from the rubble on the floor came a coin of Nuh ibn Mansur (r. 976–97) and a defaced coin of the eighth or ninth century. Several pieces of a circular dish, 46 centimeters in diameter, with an upturned rim, were also recovered. The dish, probably of the end of the tenth century, is covered with brilliant white engobe and adorned on the inside with a superb underglaze design, in black, of curved tendrils and cinquefoils. (The dish is now in the Metropolitan Museum, 38.40.246, and it is illustrated in Wilkinson, *Nishapur: Pottery*, p. 97, no. 18.)

3.16

(*opposite left*) Apse in 6D

3.17

(*opposite right*) Polychrome buff ware bowl from the alleyway (7D). Height 9.2 cm, diameter 21.2 cm. Muzé Iran Bastan, Teheran. See also Wilkinson, *Nishapur: Pottery*, p. 15, no. 47





3.18

Qanat passing under 6D2 (an ab-anbar), with an ancient tunnel beneath it

From the vicinity of the zir-i-zamin came parts of another bowl, also in black on white but of lesser quality, decorated with debased Kufic (*ibid.*, p. 98, no. 23). The bowl is now in the Teheran museum. Also found was the better part of a buff ware ewer in a completely different style (*ibid.*, p. 24, no. 72). A horned animal head forms the spout on the ewer, which is a type peculiar to Nishapur. The decoration on the body includes a crested bird with a body like a dove's and a head encircled with a strange, trilobed halo that, oddly enough, has been given wings. Among the decorative devices scattered in the background is a small cross, which would seem of little importance were it not that Sabz Pushan also produced part of a glazed sweetmeat dish of this same buff ware decorated with a true Nestorian cross (Metropolitan Museum of Art 40.170.500; see *ibid.*, p. 15, no. 48). And from the kucheh by the entrance to the zir-i-zamin (see Figure 3.6) came a complete buff ware bowl with yellow, red, and green decoration on which a large cross forms the framework of the mirror design of small coiled motifs and six-petaled rosettes (Figure 3.17).

These distinctive glazed earthenware vessels, interesting though they may be, give no hint of the function of the underground chamber, which, though one of the largest cellars at Sabz Pushan, measured no more than 7 by 2.5 meters. Because there was no well, only a sinkaway, this could not

have been an ab-anbar, another essential room in the old houses of Sabz Pushan, which one entered by descending a flight of stairs to fetch water from a small brick tank fed from runnels and qanats (Figure 3.18). But the finds from in and near the zir-i-zamin do suggest that the area had been occupied by Nestorian Christians. Further evidence of Christian inhabitants was discovered elsewhere in the ruin field (see Figure 1.184 and Wilkinson, "Christian Remains from Nishapur"). If Christians lived here, it was in an area very close indeed to a group of rooms elegantly decorated with carved plaster panels that may well have been a small madraseh of one of the schools of Islam.

### CARVED PLASTER

Much of Walter Hauser's article "The Plaster Dado from Sabz Pushan," published in the Museum's *Bulletin* in 1937, has been incorporated in this section. The untimely death of this valued colleague prevents what would have been a fruitful discussion of the carved plaster at Sabz Pushan. Hauser was responsible for the plan of the site, and it was he who organized the removal of the carved panels to the Teheran museum and to the Metropolitan Museum. All the plaster panels found in situ were cleaned and reproductions made so that each museum could have a set, half of originals, half of accurate copies. (The process of removing, cleaning, and duplicating the panels is described in detail in Hauser's article and is not repeated here.)

Excavation in the area where illicit digging had first exposed carved plaster (3C1 on the plan) soon revealed a nearly complete rectangular panel, with a design in which three large hexafoils predominated, that was 2.4 meters long and 95 centimeters high. As more of the area was cleared, it became apparent that the panel was on the southwest wall of a recess from an open court, forming an iwan (Figures 3.19, 3.20).

On the wall to the left of the long panel, forming a right angle, was what remained of a shorter panel that ended at a doorway with two steps up into an adjoining room (3D) without decoration (Figure 3.21). Beneath the floor that was coexistent with the carved plaster decoration was another room where there was also no evidence of decoration on the walls. This earlier room seems to have had a more secular purpose: in its center was a fireplace, and there were no signs of a mihrab.

The long carved panel on the southwest wall and the fragment from the southeast wall abutting it offered conclusive proof that the carved plaster decoration had not been the original wall surface in the iwan. A few centimeters below the carved plaster was a layer of smooth white plaster on which kahgil and then several newer layers of plaster had been spread. When



## 3.19

Iwan (3C1) and the inner room (3C2) looking southwest from the court (2C). Note the mihrab to the right of the long plaster panel on the southwest wall of the iwan and the collapsed Solomon's seal in the left foreground, at the entrance to the east iwan (2D)

## 3.20

Carved plaster panel on the southwest wall of the iwan. The two bands of molded kahgil above the panel were painted blue (note that the place where these bands cross to make a hexagon does not match the center of the dado below). Carved plaster panel originally polychromed, with brilliant white highlights and yellow-ocher borders. Height 95.3 cm, width 234.6 cm. The Metropolitan Museum of Art (37.40.40)





### 3.21

(above left) Remains of the carved plaster panel on the southeast wall of the iwan, where one can see the two layers of plaster that had been applied to the wall. To the left is the doorway to 3D

### 3.22

(above right) Mihrab in the west corner of the southwest wall of the iwan. The lobed upper panel on the niche encloses a linear pattern in black paint; the black mass to the left of the column is kahgil we applied to the panels before removing them.

Height of the mihrab 1.85 m. Carved plaster panel on the column: originally polychromed; height 24.1 cm, width 18.1 cm; The Metropolitan Museum of Art (37.40.42). Panel on the mihrab: originally polychromed, with a yellow-ocher beveled frame; height 41.9 cm, width 54 cm; original in the Muzé Iran Bastan, Teheran; cast in The Metropolitan Museum of Art (37.40.43)

the long panel was cleaned and treated in Teheran, several unintelligible scribbles and parts of words, scrawled haphazardly in black paint, were found on the gleaming white surface of the underlayer.

In the west corner of the southwest wall, to the right of the long panel of carving, was a shallow mihrab with a single column on its left side (Figure 3.22). The upper portion of the mihrab in the iwan was decorated with a trefoil-topped panel, its moldings modeled in mud and straw, that enclosed a linear pattern also done in black paint. Some small fragments of the painted design showed in the places where the later surface of thin white plaster had flaked off. A carved rectangular panel with an inner beveled frame formed the bottom of the mihrab. This decoration, and probably the very similar carved palmette at the base of the mihrab's single column as well, was contemporary with all of the other panels in the iwan. The narrow column was surmounted by a ball capital. Above a horizontal brick, slightly to the left, was evidence of another, earlier column, somewhat taller and even more slender, whose cap had been plastered over (in Figure 3.22 the cap has been exposed).

The right-hand side of the mihrab abutted a wall of varying thickness that formed a partition between the iwan and an adjoining room (3C2). The



3.23

West corner of the iwan, showing the carved plaster panels on the northwest wall (see 3.24). The doorway leads to the inner room (3C2)

3.24

(opposite left) Carved plaster panels on the northwest wall of the iwan. Originally polychromed. Left: height 85.7 cm, width 99.1 cm; right: height 87 cm, width 78.4 cm. Originals in the Muzé Iran Bastan, Teheran; casts in The Metropolitan Museum of Art (37.40.45, 46)

wall was of flimsy construction, especially near the mihrab, but it had been decorated with two square panels of carved plaster (Figures 3.23, 3.24), the one on the right projecting a little in front of the other, the reveal itself also having a narrow panel of carving (Figure 3.25). The panel on the left was the only one in these rooms where any care had been taken to score the layer beneath in order to achieve a close bond when the thicker layer of plaster to be carved was applied (Figure 3.26). The back of the right-hand panel showed no signs of scoring, but on the backs of both squares the major lines of the design, which was cut into the plaster while it was still damp, were carved deeply enough to go right through to the layer beneath.

The design of the left-hand square in Figure 3.24 is very similar in character to that of the long panel on the southwest wall. The basic figure is a hexafoil with a single foil uppermost. The two hexafoils nearest it in the long panel also have a single foil at the top, whereas the one on the far left is turned sideways so that a pair of semicircular foils are uppermost. (Most Western designers would have put the odd hexafoil in the center with the two similar ones balancing each other on either side.) The square panel on the right is in the same style as the others, but the principal geometric figure is a quatrefoil, and the space in its center is filled with a tulip-shaped form instead of a circle with interior ornament. More elaborate tulip forms with patterned piercing fill the two horizontal foils.

Within a strictly geometric framework, the carved plaster decoration in the iwan is full of well-disciplined vigor. Despite the repetition of leaflike forms, a great deal of variety has been achieved by basically two different



methods of cutting within the outlines. In one method, deep slotted patterns were cut into the flat surface, so that even without their color the panels retain their very rich effect. Furthermore, the patterns are by no means the same: quite cunningly, tulip forms have occasionally been substituted for "leaves." The other method involved cutting at an angle combined with a little slotting. Nowhere has anything been preserved to equal this particular work, which is a later development of a technique that seems first to have appeared in the ninth century at Samarra (Creswell, *Early Muslim Architecture* 2, pl. 52).

All the panels that compose the dado from the iwan have borders of two plain bands colored with yellow-ocher, which has survived very well. Between the bands is a distinctive chainlike pattern consisting of long links separated by diamonds. The outlines of the quatrefoil and the hexafoils are broken by strongly marked rings, a motif that to my knowledge appears only at Sabz Pushan and at Nayin (Pope, "Architectural Ornament," pp. 1272-73, figs. 457, 458). The two narrow ridges on either side of the wider band with the rings are painted not yellow-ocher but a bright yellow, whereas the band itself is a brilliant white that stands out against the off-white of the general mass of carved plaster. Within the panels were traces of brilliant colors such as blue and red, but not enough remained to make a restoration. When it was first exposed, the star in the central disk of the hexafoil at the right end of the long panel shone bright yellow against a blue background.

The room (302) adjoining the iwan, on the other side of the irregular

### 3.25

Carved plaster panel removed from the projection between the two panels in 3.24. Originally polychromed. Height 85.1 cm, width 26.7 cm. Original in the Muzé Iran Bastan, Teheran; cast in The Metropolitan Museum of Art (37.40.47)

### 3.26

Back of the left-hand panel in 3.24, showing scoring and the deeply cut lines of the carved design on the front





3.27

Carved plaster dado collapsed on a low (but not the lowest) floor in 3C2, the inner room (see 3.33). Note the strip of border in situ to the left, on the northwest wall near the floor

partition wall, was in a perilous state when excavated. Although we could see that murals painted in red and black had once decorated the upper part of the walls and a dado of carved plaster the lower part, the entire room was a shambles, with fallen material everywhere and very little in situ (Figure 3.27). That there had been much change here is certain; according to Hauser (in "Plaster Dado"), the partition was a later addition, as was the southwest wall of the room, which had originally been chineh on square baked bricks that were replaced by khisht. Hauser referred to this room as both the inner room and the domed room. I prefer the former, as whether the room was domed is questionable. The plaster decoration in the inner room was also not of the first period, as it had been applied to a 17-millimeter-thick coating of kahgil that had been painted red. Much of the plaster had fallen directly onto a complete floor with no footing—proof that it was the last surface applied to the walls before the room was destroyed.

One jamb of the doorway between the iwan and 3C2 had been decorated with a carved plaster panel (Figure 3.28). Though only the lower part had survived, that proved possible to remove and clean. The opposite jamb was undecorated. On this side of the rather thin partition, the southeast wall of 3C2 (Figure 3.29), a recess had been made, and on the white ground of its rear wall was a six-petaled white rosette within a red circle that had been

first drawn with a compass and then outlined in black. Below the recess, in the lower right corner of the partition wall, a little remained of a carved plaster dado that had probably been about the same height (90 cm) as those in the iwan. The dado abutted an engaged column that proved to form the left-hand side of another mihrab, separated from the one in the iwan only by the partition. As the detail in Figure 3.30 shows, a bit of the carved decoration—imitation strapwork with the spaces between punctured by stars—had survived on the bottom of the column. An indication also survived to show that there had been a corresponding engaged column on the right-hand side of this mihrab.

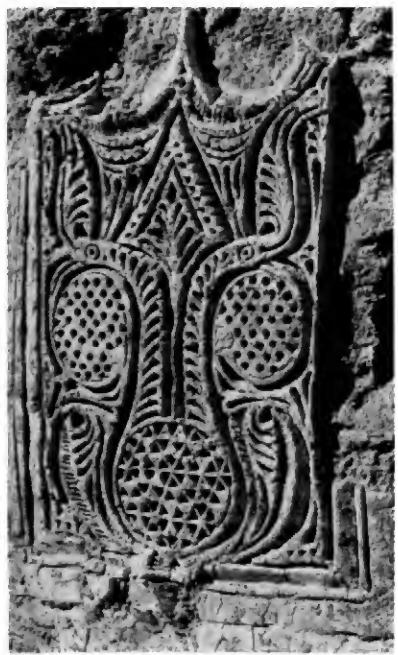
Although very little was left of the dado on this side of the partition, it will be perceived that the quality of the work seems inferior to that on the dadoes found in place in the iwan. The geometric framework is also different: enough remained to show there was at least one large hexagonal outline, within which was a large disk edged by a slotted border enclosing what appears to be pseudolettering, and there is no broad yellow-ocher border. The border consists of long, thin half-leaves that resemble those on the topmost layer of carving found in situ in the prayer hall at Tepe Madraseh (see Figure 1.125).

Similar long, thin leaf shapes appear on a panel that fortunately was still adhering to the wall to the left of the doorway, where the decoration, even though not complete, extended to a greater height (Figure 3.31). In the upper part of the panel, framed by a border on three sides with additional decoration above, is the word *al-akhirin* (posternity), in Kufic lettering. This could be part of an inscription from the Koran; for example, 26:4, part of the story of Abraham, says, “And ordain for me a goodly mention among posterity.”

When this panel was cleaned and a reproduction made in Teheran, it was discovered that immediately beneath the inscription was another, finer one, not carved in plaster but beautifully drawn in black outline, the characters gray against a white background (Figure 3.32). This handsome, carefully drawn lettering is far superior to the carved lettering that covered it, and very different indeed from the scribble and parts of words that were revealed when the long panel from the iwan was treated. Here was definite proof that the carved decoration was not the original surface when the structure was first built, although there was no way of knowing how much time had elapsed before the carved surface was applied, and it was impossible even to tell if the fine lettering was contemporary with the white surface with occasional scribbles found in the iwan. As the lettering was drawn on a very thin layer of plaster, it could not have been a preliminary drawing made before the plaster was cut. The graceful added curves bear some relationship to lettering at Nayin attributed to the tenth century (Flury, “Ornamental Kufic

### 3.28

Carved plaster panel decorating the southwest jamb of the doorway between the iwan and the inner room. The opposite jamb was left plain, presumably because the door lay against it when open. Panel originally polychromed. Height 88.3 cm, width 62.2 cm. Original in the Muzé Iran Bastan, Teheran; cast in The Metropolitan Museum of Art (37.40.44)



## 3.29

Southeast wall of the inner room, where only parts of the carved plaster dado remained in place. The back wall of the inset in the upper part of the wall to the right of the doorway is decorated with an incised and painted rosette



## 3.31

(left) Carved plaster panel, topped by a Kufic inscription, to the left of the doorway on the southeast wall of the inner room. Originally polychromed. Height 144.2 cm, width 40.6 cm. The Metropolitan Museum of Art (37.40.41).

## 3.30

(above) Remains of the carved plaster in the south corner of the inner room. The engaged column decorated with strapwork frames the left side of the mihrab in the southwest wall

Inscriptions," p. 1744, fig. 599, and "Mosquée de Nayin," pl. XXXII). The Nishapur lettering, however, has a carefully drawn notched triangular head; the head on the Nayin lettering is trilobed and curving.

From the fallen pieces of carved plaster in the inner room we were able to reconstruct a large panel 91 centimeters high and 2.71 meters long, the greater part of a dado (Figure 3.33). The border that frames the restored panel consists of two broad yellow-ocher bands containing a series of ornamental triangles separating pairs of long, leaflike forms growing in opposite directions from small quatrefoils or disks pierced by four small holes. Eight-pointed stars bordered by white bands punctuated by rings form the main design. Each of the circles within the stars is filled with different decoration. In the two outer stars a pseudo-inscription, much like that on the scrap of carving on the southeast wall (Figure 3.30), coils around the inner ring; in the two in the center the coil is a simple leaf pattern. A large palmette ending in a bird's head has survived in the center of the panel; a bird's head fills the circle to the right, and four smaller ones, complete with crests, thrust into the points of the star to the left. Bird-headed palmettes figured in the designs on the panels in the iwan (Figures 3.20, 3.25), and, as we have seen, they were found in the carved plaster decoration retrieved from other mounds at Nishapur (see Figures 1.136–1.138 and the accompanying discussion).

Adjacent eight-pointed stars appear in the carved plaster decoration high above the mihrab in the Masjid-i-Jami' at Nayin (Pope, *Survey* 4, pl. 269d). At Nayin, however, the stars are filled with a monotonous repetition of a conventional pattern derived from a vine leaf and a bunch of grapes, and the decoration therefore lacks the vitality of this work from Nishapur, a city that was probably a more lively artistic center in the early Abbasid days than was Nayin. The border on this panel is also clearly related to one in the mosque at Nayin (Pope and Ackerman, "Persian Ornament," p. 2720, fig.



3.32

Part of a Kufic inscription painted on the plaster wall beneath the carved inscription in 3.31. Letters originally gray outlined in black. Height 46 cm, width 35.6 cm. The Metropolitan Museum of Art (38.40.253)

3.33

Carved plaster panel assembled from fragments found on the floor of the inner room (the pieces in the lower left corner were still on the wall). Partially restored. Originally polychromed, with yellow borders. Height 91 cm, width 271 cm. The Metropolitan Museum of Art (40.170.443)





3.34

Carved plaster panel collapsed at the foot of the southwest wall of 2D, the east iwan (see 3.35)

920). But more important are the resemblances between this Nishapur carving and the carved plaster found at Mashhad-i-Misriyan, not very far east of the south end of the Caspian Sea and thus much closer to Nishapur. In the spandrels of a carved plaster mihrab at Mashhad-i-Misriyan there is a leaf coiled so as to form a near circle, as well as a pair of leaves with curled tips that strongly suggest birds' heads. The conventional vine leaf and bunch of grapes also appear in the plaster at Mashhad-i-Misriyan, but they are treated in a much more virile fashion than at Nayin (Flury, "Mihrab of Mashhad-i-Misriyan," pp. 2722–24, figs. 922–24).

To the east of the iwan (3C1) was a recess from the courtyard that formed what could be considered another iwan (see Figure 3.19). Hauser called this the east niche, or iwan, in his preliminary report (Hauser, "Plaster Dado," pp. 28–29). On the southwest side of the east iwan (2D) the plaster had slid down the wall to the floor (Figure 3.34). When the fragments were assembled they formed a design unlike any so far found in Sabz Pushan: two triangles interlocked to form the symbol known as Solomon's seal or the Star of David (Figure 3.35). This symbol was important in Islamic art as well. It is to be seen in a richly decorated tenth-century stucco panel from Afrasiyab that is now in the Samarkand Museum (Pugachenkova, *Samarkand, Bukhara*, p. 21, fig. 4). Cut in a distinctive but simpler and less sophisticated style not found at Nishapur, the symbol also appears on both sides of the head of a mihrab of a little oratory in the mosque of al-Hakim, built in Cairo in 1003 (Creswell, *Muslim Architecture of Egypt*, pl. 31D). All that was left of the filling of the hexagon within the star found at Sabz Pushan was an indication that it had been of a foliate nature.



3.35

Solomon's seal motif assembled from the remains of the carved plaster panel in 3.34. Height about 70 cm, width about 63 cm

The floor of the east iwan was littered with fallen plaster, but a little carving was found still adhering to the wall on both sides of the east corner (Figures 3.36–3.40). Eight-pointed stars similar to those in the reconstructed panel from the inner room recur in these designs. These borders, however, are far bolder. The tips of the half-palmettes are so curved they resemble the Scythian birds' heads, and the carving is also reminiscent of that at Mashhad-i-Misriyan (Flury, "Mihrab of Mashhad-i-Misriyan," pl. 923). One fragment



3.36

East iwan looking southeast, with the collapsed carved plaster dadoes covering the floor. Note the scrap of carving still in situ to the left, in the east corner (see 3.37)

3.37

(right) Fragments of carved plaster found in situ on the northeast wall near the east corner of the east iwan. Height about 36 cm, width about 34 cm



3.38

(far right) Fragments of carved plaster from the east iwan. Height about 27 cm, width about 36 cm



3.39

(right) Fragments of carved plaster from the east iwan. Height about 30.5 cm, width about 37 cm



3.40

(far right) Carved plaster in situ in the east iwan



(Figure 3.40) retains the bottom edge of what appears to have been a rectangular tablet. The tablet may well have contained an inscription, but unfortunately not a trace remained.

The panel shown in Figure 3.41 was assembled from fragments retrieved from the debris in the courtyard (2C). Neither the border pattern nor the cusped form inside the rectangle appeared in any other carved plaster finds from Nishapur. The cusped shape is echoed on a piece of carved brick retrieved from the Nishapur ruin field (see Figure 1.89). The motif seems to have been most popular in the eleventh and twelfth centuries: it appeared in carved stone at Ghazna, now in Afghanistan (Pope, "Architectural Ornament," figs. 499b, c), and it is used as a continuous design in a frieze on a brick wall in the *Masjid-i-Jami'* at Qazvin, which dates to 1116 (Pope, *Survey* 5, pl. 523). (Incidentally, the style of the carved plaster at Nishapur bears no relation to the work at Qazvin, some 800 kilometers to the west.)

From the mass of fallen plaster in the courtyard and the east iwan also came the fragments assembled in the panel in Figure 3.42. The reconstructed parts of the dado show white in the photograph; the bottom border is purely

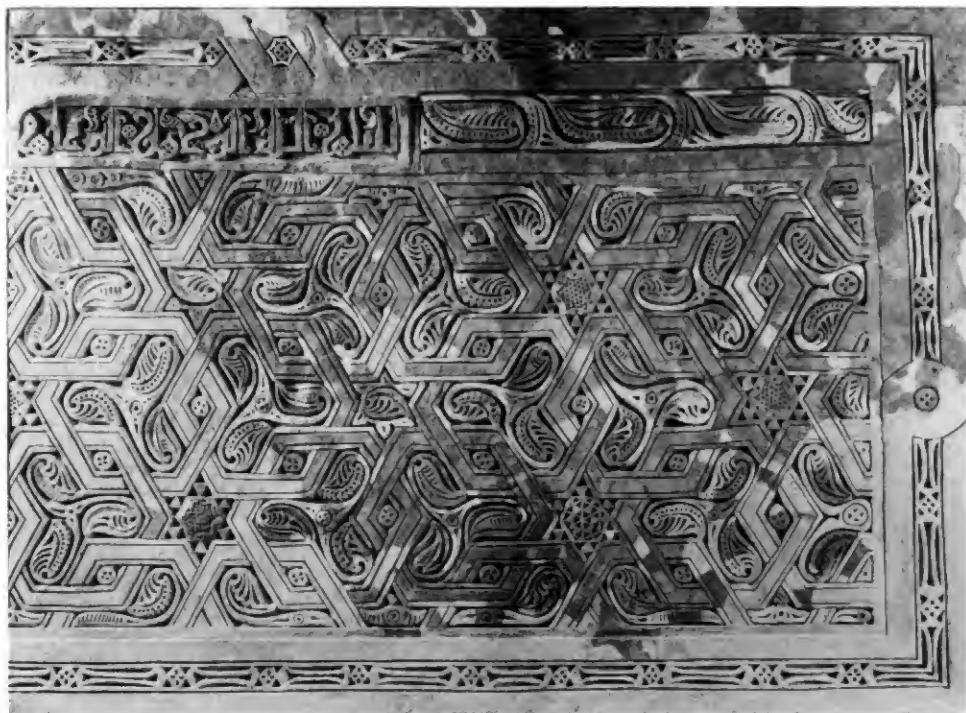
conjectural. The panel has an inscription that consists of the formula *bi'ism Allah al-rahman al-rahim* (in the name of God, the merciful, the compassionate). This lettering differs in style from the inscription on the tall panel in the inner room (see Figure 3.31). It is less cramped, and the background, on which the blue has survived, has a variety of fillers in the forms of pendant leaves, disks with four drilled holes, and a "teardrop."

All of the plain borders on this panel were painted yellow-ocher. The strapwork of interwoven hexagons that forms the design brings to mind the later work at Termez (Pugachenkova and Rempel, *Istoriya iskusstva Uzbekistana*, pls. 203, 204, 206), but at Termez the cutting is less sophisticated and the strapwork, which is not so integral a part of the design, has been left bare, without borders. In this Nishapur panel, triskelions composed of leaves



3.41

Carved plaster panel assembled from fragments found in the courtyard (2C). Partially restored. Originally polychromed, with yellow-ocher on the plain bands. Height 102 cm, width 83 cm. The Metropolitan Museum of Art (40.170.439)



3.42

Carved plaster panel assembled from fragments found in the courtyard and the east iwan. Restored areas show white. Originally polychromed; blue paint survives on the background of the inscription at the top, yellow-ocher on the plain borders. Height 1.73 m, width 2.43 m. The Metropolitan Museum of Art (40.170.442)

are skillfully combined with deeply cut six-pointed stars and quarries to create an overall unity that is enlivened by various local differences. The only hint of monotony is to be seen in the three large “leaves” that form a horizontal band to the right of the inscription.

Although some details in the carved plaster decoration the expedition found at Nishapur link it to work elsewhere, on the evidence of these panels from Sabz Pushan alone the Nishapur artists can be said to have had their own style, with its own distinctive character. And although the Sabz Pushan dadoes in some ways resemble the cut plaster discovered in the other mounds at Nishapur, which may be somewhat earlier, they show a technical ability and skill in design that lift the art of carving plaster to so high a level of excellence that one forgets the lowness of the material itself.

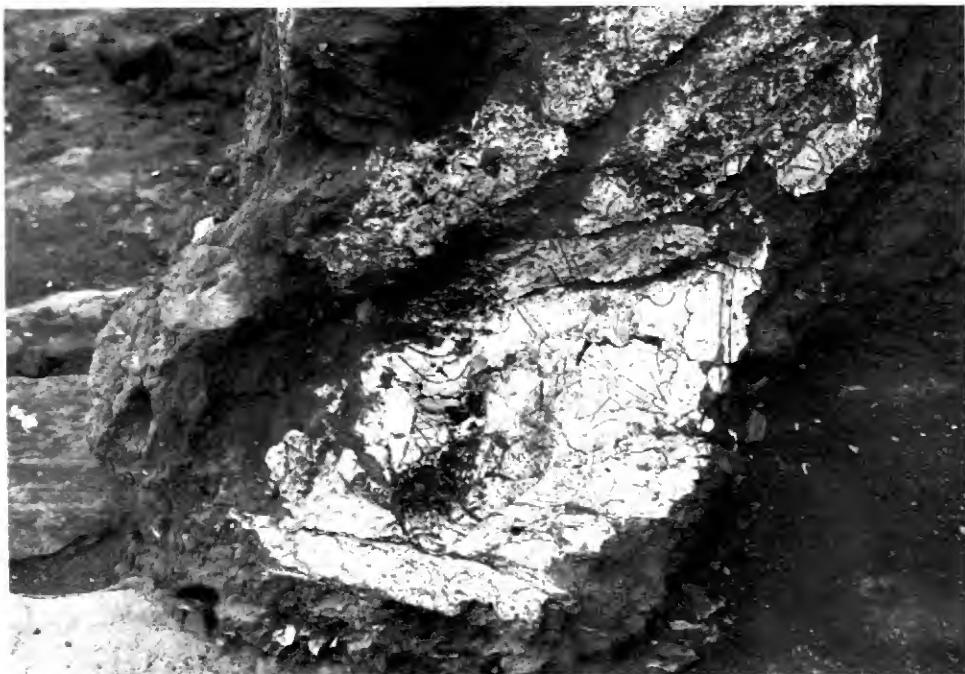
#### WALL PAINTING

Even more extraordinary than the carved plaster decoration at Sabz Pushan, on which but little pigment remained, were the fragments of wall painting discovered there, including some painted plaster mukarnas of two different shapes that had presumably decorated the transition to a dome. This painting bore no resemblance to the wall paintings at Tepe Madraseh.

*Mural Painting*

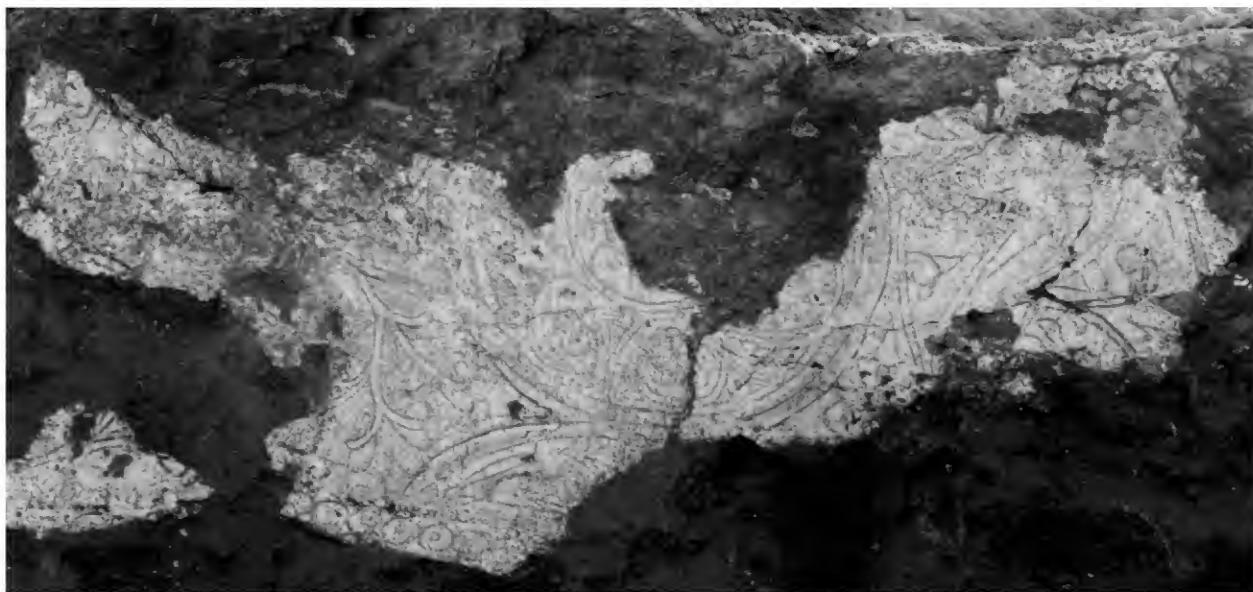
We uncovered the first evidence of wall painting at Sabz Pushan in the iwan (3C1) where the exposed plaster panels had led to the excavation of this particular site. As can be seen in Figures 3.20 and 3.23, the wall above the carved plaster dado was decorated with two parallel bands molded in kahgil and painted blue. The point at which the bands crossed to form a hexagon on the southwest wall, curiously enough, did not correspond to the center of the long plaster panel, suggesting that changes had been made. The mihrab to the right of the long panel (see Figure 3.22), though badly damaged, also showed signs of wall painting, which seems to have been enclosed in an area headed by two cusped heads of slightly different shape. The filling patterns could have been vegetal motifs, but they were in such poor condition that no adequate reconstruction is possible.

Near the doorway between the iwan and the adjoining inner room a mass of painting on kahgil had collapsed along with other wall surface, covering the carved plaster panel that adorned the doorjamb and spilling into the inner room (Figure 3.43). The parts of the painting in the mass shown in the photograph were of course not all originally contiguous, as the various fragments overlapped as they fell. The decoration seems to have been edged by a row of circles with dots in their centers. Stiff stems with smaller curved branches can be made out above the border, but it is impossible to be sure what sort of leaves or fruit may have been attached.



3.43

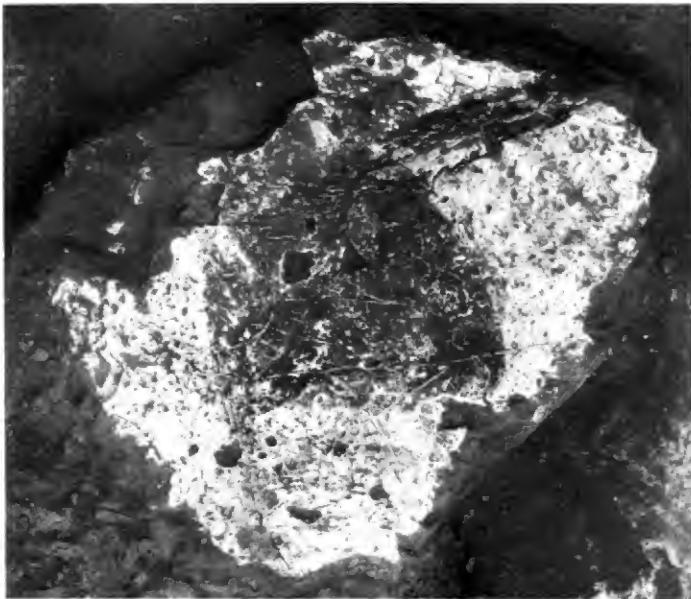
Collapsed wall painting on the south-east side of the inner room, near the doorway to the iwan



3.44

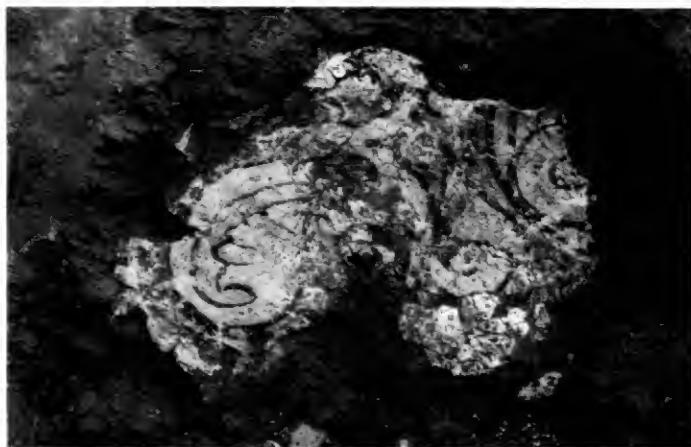
Remnants of painting to the right of the mihrab on the southwest wall of the inner room. Red and black on white plaster. Diameter of circle about 17 cm. Drawing by Charles K. Wilkinson

The only painting in the inner room that could be photographed in place was on the upper part of the southwest wall, to the right of the mihrab and above the plaster dado that had disintegrated but for a tiny bit at floor level. Figure 3.44 shows the original painting and the tracing made from it. The painting, done in red and black on the white plaster ground, was edged by a straight border of circles within circles. Prominent in the design are two large concentric circles filled with leafy forms that might be described as palmettes and half-palmettes. The ornamental circles are set among other leaf shapes growing from curved stems. Not enough of the painting was preserved to indicate its general layout or how large it had been. No painting like this was found in Tepe Madraseh or in the Qanat Tepe, but some



3.45

Fragment of painted plaster on the floor of the inner room, showing a man wearing a black conical hat. Height 26 cm, width 30 cm. Drawing by Charles K. Wilkinson



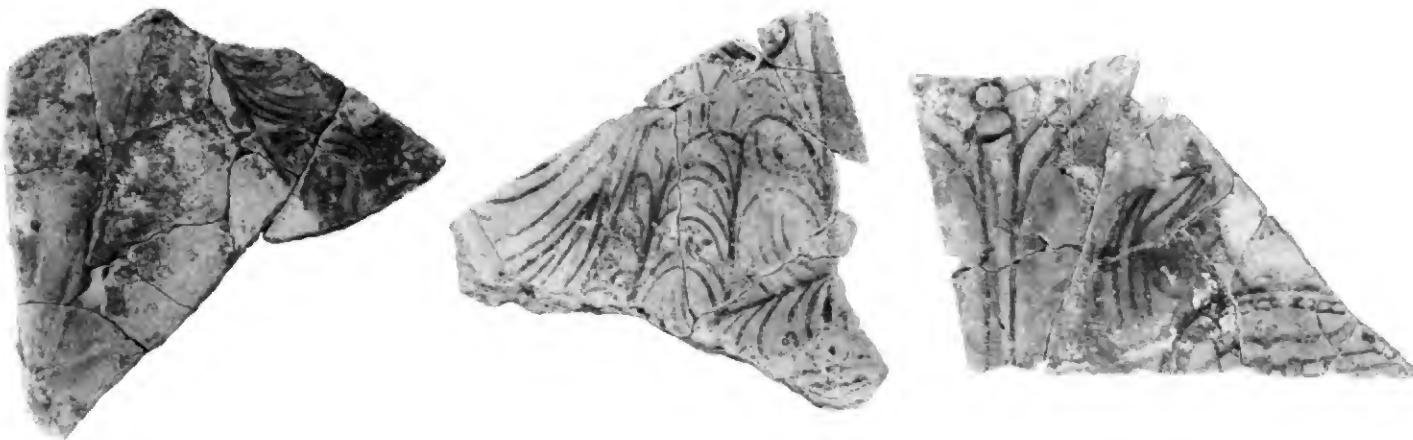
3.46

Scrap of painted plaster with a foliate design found under the floor in 3E1

painting in a related style was discovered in the sondage at the South Horn (Plates 8, 9).

A fragment found on the floor of the inner room shows the head of a man painted on a white background (Figure 3.45). The man wears a black conical hat. On the forehead beneath the hat a fringe of small regular curls has survived, but the eyes are damaged and the lower part of the face is missing. Nothing was found to suggest that this piece actually decorated one of the walls of the room.

Another scrap of painting was discovered under the floor in room 3E1 (Figure 3.46). Of greater interest, however, are some fragments of painting on white plaster retrieved from a well sunk into the floor of 5C, a room not far from the iwan. Determining the original position of these fragments was



3.47

(above left) Fragment of painted plaster from a well in 5C. Left edge is a true edge. Drapery (or border pattern) drawn in red and black, background red with one touch of blue, arrowlike shape yellow with a black outline. Height 24 cm, width 23.5 cm. The Metropolitan Museum of Art (38.40.268)

3.48

(above center) Fragment of painted plaster from a well in 5C. Drapery drawn in black on white. Height 20 cm, width 24 cm

3.49

(above right) Fragment of painted plaster from a well in 5C, showing what could be part of a depiction of a lute player. Bottom edge beveled on the back. Drapery (on what may be a shoulder) blue, rosette yellow, background red. Height 17 cm, width 25 cm. The Metropolitan Museum of Art (38.40.269)

impossible; no direct relationship could be established between them and the painting in the iwan and the inner room, and no related fragments were found on either the walls or the floor of room 5C. From the small fragments that survived we were able to reconstruct a bit of border, some drapery, part of a figure possibly playing a lute (Figures 3.47–3.49), and several heads, two of them sufficiently complete to give a good idea of their character. The fragment with the lute player (Figure 3.49)—painted on a reddish background to the right of what seems to be a staff with a ball capital separating two arched enclosures—provides the only hint of what the subject of the painting might have been. There were no other clues as to whom or what it represented.

Both males and females are depicted on the fragments, with considerable variety. One of the two better-preserved heads, a female, was reproduced in watercolor in 1940 by Lindsley F. Hall (Plate 10). A blue halo encircles the woman's head. Five bold curls frame her bulging forehead, and one long, straight lock falls over her right cheek to below her eye. The eyebrows on this face are exceedingly strong. As on all the heads in this group, the nose is outlined in red, as is the line that indicates the upper edge of the eyeball, and the eyes and the red mouth are outlined in black. The woman's mouth is full and curved but extremely small. Such small mouths are a feature of certain Seljuq heads, for example a stucco head in the Metropolitan Museum (Dimand, *Handbook*, p. 93, fig. 55) and another in Berlin (*Islamische Kunst*, no. 165, pl. 23). The short black strokes at either side and just below the center of the lower lip are a curious treatment that seems to be peculiar to this particular head, and the eyes in no way resemble those on either of the stucco heads or on the heads on Seljuq luster and polychrome ceramics of the late twelfth century (see, for example, Lane, *Early Islamic Pottery*, pl. 52B, which dates to 1179).

The black spots on the cheeks just beneath the eyes on this head do not appear on the others found with it. The spots may be tattoo marks, but they

are more likely scars that were artificially induced, a custom that, as Carl Schuster pointed out to me a number of years ago, has persisted among the Mongols. The Uzbek man shown in Figure 3.50 has such scars, although in his case the scars seem more natural. It would seem that these scars are related to the prevalence of the *salaq*, the circular scar left by a boil, which often breaks out on the cheek and to which the inhabitants of Iraq and eastward to Uzbekistan are very susceptible. It is not inconceivable that the artificial beauty marks became fashionable in order to remove the stigma of the real blemishes, in much the same way Western women painted artificial moles on their faces.

The spots call to mind the circular marks seen on terracotta figures from Uzbekistan, where the practice of portraying female musicians and goddesses with round spots on their cheeks (though not as close to the eyes as in this painting) goes back at least to Parthian times (first to third century). Many of these figures are in the Samarkand Museum (Meshkeris, *Terrakoty*, figs. 4[1], 7[1], pl. VII, no. 84; Pugachenkova and Rempel, *Istoriya iskusstva Uzbekistana*, fig. 69). The figurine of a goddess bearing such marks was perhaps meant to defend its owner against the disfiguring *salaqs*. The custom is also reflected in later art. A Timurid painting in the Metropolitan Museum from an early fifteenth-century manuscript of Rashid al-Din's *Jami al-Tavarikh* (Universal history) shows a pair of lovers, probably Prince Humay and the Chinese princess Humayun (Dimand, "New Accessions," p. 231, and see also p. 232). On each of the princess's cheeks is a circle delicately drawn in line. A Safavid tile of the seventeenth century shows a circular black spot on the cheek of the Persian girl, but the Chinese girl has no such marks (*Islamische Kunst*, pls. 44, 274d). As the black marks appear only on this one Nishapur fragment, they may represent a fashion that had limited use there.

Enough is left of this fragment to show a little of the robe the woman is wearing, which has unusual featherlike ruffles around the neckline. The only instance I know of anything that resembles this appears in a seventh-century painting in Piandzhikent (Voronina, "Arkhitekturnyy ornament," pl. 21), but the resemblance is faint and may be purely accidental.

In the general character of the features another female head (Figure 3.51) is obviously related to the one just described, but, judging by the piece of the right cheek that has survived, there are no black spots beneath the eyes. This woman also has a halo, but it now consists merely of a defining black outline. Whereas the first woman looks to her left, this head is turned slightly to its right. The curls and eyebrows on these two fragments are similar, and both show very little of the hair above the strongly marked fringe of curls.

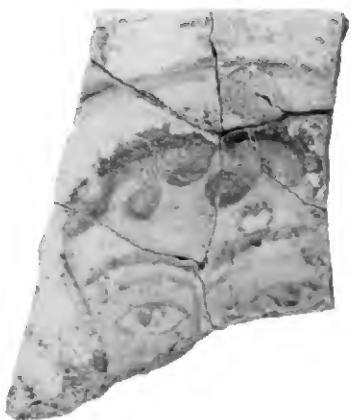


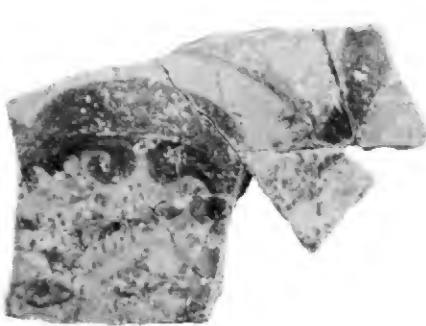
3.50

An Uzbek man and his son. Note the scars on the man's cheeks

3.51

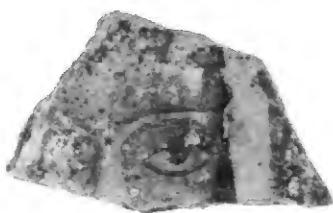
Fragment of painted plaster from a well in 5C, showing the head of a woman. Top edge is a true edge. Line between eye and brow red, background probably vermillion. Height 16 cm, width 13 cm. Muzé Iran Bastan, Teheran





3.52

Fragment of painted plaster from a well in 5C, showing the head of a woman (see Plate 11). Bottom edge beveled on the back. Height 11 cm, width 17 cm. The Metropolitan Museum of Art (38.40.270)



3.53

Fragment of painted plaster from a well in 5C, showing the head of a woman. Brow and outline of eye black, background reddish. Height 7 cm, width 12 cm. Muzé Iran Bastan, Teheran

A third female head, drawn on a somewhat smaller scale (Figure 3.52, Plate 11), has a white halo. Like the other two, she has strong eyebrows and coiled curls on her forehead (in this case two large curls coiled in opposite directions), but more of her black hair, so smooth it resembles a skullcap, is shown.

Judging from what little has survived, the fourth female head (Figure 3.53) is quite unlike the others. There are no signs of curls. The eyebrows are narrower and straighter, and the upper lid of the eye is less curved, giving an altogether different look to the face. The white streak down the side of the face is the plaster surface showing where the paint has flaked away.

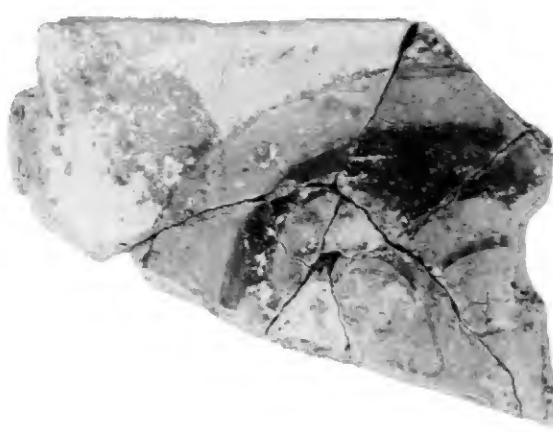
There were also parts of two male heads, one of which was well enough preserved to give a good impression of its original appearance (Figure 3.54). Like the first female head (Plate 10), this man has been provided with a blue halo. He is heavily bearded and bears a striking resemblance to the Uzbek in Figure 3.50, though he has no marks on his cheeks. The way his garment swirls around his neck and across his shoulder is very surprising for the depiction of a man in early Islamic art.

Part of another male head was retrieved in very poor condition (Figure 3.55). The halo on this head is a pinkish color, which suggests it once was red. The Manichaeans used red for nimbi in book illustrations, as we know from a painting, now in Berlin, on a leaf from a book of the eighth to ninth century from Khocho (*Along the Ancient Silk Routes*, p. 176, no. 114). We



3.54

Fragment of painted plaster from a well in 5C, showing the head and shoulders of a bearded man. Halo blue; beard, brows, and outline and pupils of eyes black; lips red outlined in black; outline of nose and line above eye red. Height about 29 cm, width about 26 cm. Muzé Iran Bastan, Teheran



3.55

Fragment of painted plaster from a well in 5C, showing a man's head. Top and left edges are true edges. Face and halo pinkish on a red background; outline of face, nose, and line between eye and brow red; hair, eyebrows, and outline and pupils of eyes black. Height 15 cm, width 20.5 cm. The Metropolitan Museum of Art (38.40.271)

also found a red halo on a painting at the Qanat Tepe (see Figure 4.37, Plate 28). The eyebrows on this fragment are arched, but they are not so strong as the bearded man's. The distinctive hairline comes down in a low V almost to the bridge of the nose. This "widow's peak" is to be seen in the fifth- to sixth-century painting at Balalyk Tepe (Pugachenkova and Rempel, *Istoriya iskusstva Uzbekistana*, pls. 80, 136), and (though with blond hair, not black as on all the other examples) in the seventh-century paintings of donors in the Cave of the Sixteen Sword Bearers at Kyzyl (Bussagli, *Painting of Central Asia*, p. 80; *Along the Ancient Silk Routes*, p. 168, no. 107). It is seen again in a Buddhist painting from Balawaste of the seventh to eighth century in the National Museum in New Delhi (Bussagli, *Painting of Central Asia*, p. 60). There is no reason to believe that the bearded man (Figure 3.54) had hair that grew in this fashion; the dark marks at the top edge of the fragment above the brows are not paint but places where the white surface of the plaster has suffered damage.

Two other painted heads are definitely not human (Figures 3.56, 3.57, Plate 12). They perhaps represent jinn or other unpleasant creatures, for they are painted blue and have white ovals surrounding their eyes, which are

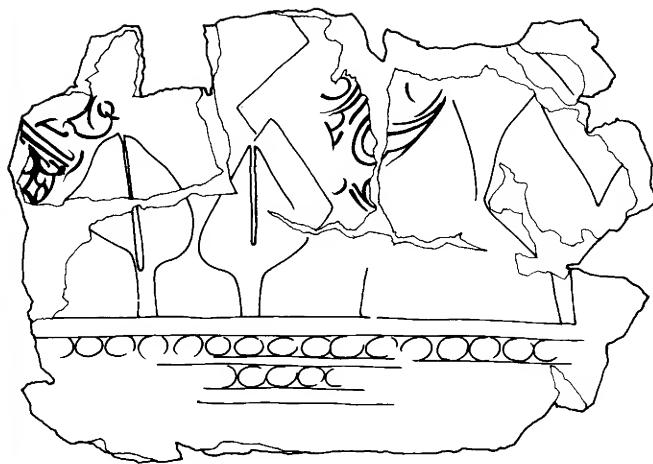


3.56

(far left) Fragment of painted plaster from a well in 5C, showing the face of a jinn (see Plate 12). Height 12 cm, width 10.5 cm. The Metropolitan Museum of Art (38.40.267)

3.57

(left) Fragment of painted plaster from a well in 5C, showing the face of a jinn. Bottom edge beveled on the back. Blue and green on a reddish background, outline and pupils of eyes black. Height 17 cm, width about 19.5 cm. Muzé Iran Bastan, Teheran



3.58

Fragments of painted plaster from the bottom section of a mural, found in a well in 5C. Border red with white disks outlined in black, design above blue with streaks of green and traces of black outlines. Height about 36.5 cm, width about 53 cm. Drawing by William Schenck

turned completely to the right. Both heads have wavy black lines over the lower half of the face that can be interpreted as either hair or chain mail. The larger fragment has what looks like an arrow shaft at the left, and a device takes the place of eyebrows. The painting is in poor condition, but what remains suggests that the head was more or less pointed at the top. This obviously is not a creature of this world!

Several fragments that appear to have formed the bottom section of a wall painting were also found in the well (Figure 3.58). They indicate a border composed of three red bands separated by two rows of pearls outlined in black. Above this running border are various black forms of which only the rough shape can be discerned. The top portion of the reconstructed piece is blue with streaks of green and traces of black lines.

There is no way of associating this border with any of the other painted pieces. Far more is missing than has been preserved. In the endeavor to make some sense of these islands of fragments in a sea of nothingness, certain beveled edges on the backs of the fragments provide a clue. The bevels at the top edges of the most complete female (Plate 10) and of the somewhat similar one looking slightly the other way (Figure 3.51) indicate the faces may have been on one level. Judging by the position of the eyes, the bearded man and the man with the widow's peak (Figures 3.54, 3.55) also belonged at the same height. The two female heads might have been placed on either side of the bearded man. So far, so good. Beyond this, however, speculation seems to lead nowhere. The small female head (Figure 3.52) had a bevel at the bottom, not the top. The presence of the jinn would rule out the possibility that this was a court scene, but though all the fragments are contemporary, there is no proof even that all came off the same wall. Were these particular pieces thrown into a convenient pit when the painting was purposely destroyed?

### *Mukarnas*

From deep in a wrecked cellar (8C) in Sabz Pushan parts of eleven plaster mukarnas (concave elements used to fill squinches) were retrieved (Figures 3.59–3.69, Plates 13, 14). The mukarnas are interesting for their rarity, their age, and the unique decoration painted upon them. Unfortunately none was intact, and all of them had suffered badly during the past centuries, not only from the initial destruction of the room they had once adorned but from infiltrating water that had affected the quality of the paint.

By shape and size the mukarnas fall into two distinct groups. Five of them are larger, both wider and taller, than the others, and have an uppermost projecting point. The squinches found at Tim, in Uzbekistan, in the mausoleum of Arab Ata, built in 977–78, have the same two types of plaster mukarnas (*Cambridge History of Islam* 2, fig. 9a; Pugachenkova and Rempel, *Istoriya iskusstva Uzbekistana*, pl. 102). The six smaller mukarnas have a front edge in one vertical plane. They are similar to the central elements over the right-angled corners in that same mausoleum at Tim, but much narrower in proportion to the height. Of those sufficiently complete to furnish reasonably accurate measurements, two of the first type are 36 centimeters high, one is 35, and one is 34, with the maximum width varying from 27 to 29 centimeters. Five of the second, smaller group range from 29 to 31 centimeters in height; three of them vary in width from 20 to 22 centimeters, and two are approximately 15 centimeters wide. The thickness of the plaster on all is 1.2 centimeters. Two less complete fragments, one part of a large element, the other of the second type, were also retrieved.

The mukarnas have smooth white plaster backs. They were evidently made separately and incorporated into the building in such a way that when it collapsed or was destroyed, they fell independently—which would be the case if, as is most probable, they had been inserted into a structure made of sun-dried brick. Not one of them showed any sign of having been attached to the architecture, as had those discovered in a Fatimid bathhouse in Fustat (Wiet, *Exposition d'art persan*, nos. P1–7, pls. 52, 53; Hassan, *Kunuz al-Fatimid*, pls. 3–5).

Although some of the mukarnas from both groups are similar in design, no two are precisely alike. All of them, however, have the same color scheme: blue, red, and yellow with black outlines; blue is used as the background for the main design, with red and yellow applied to various parts in a well-balanced way. They also have similar borders composed of a white band between two strong red lines, transversed at intervals by black curves. The space within the border is filled with foliate forms far removed from true foliage, though some can be identified as palmettes and half-palmettes or

## 3.59-3.69

Fragments of eleven mukarnas, or squinch members, found in 8C, a wrecked cellar. White plaster, 1.2 cm thick, painted with vaselike designs in blue, red, and yellow with black outlines

## 3.59

Height 31 cm, width 21 cm. Muzé Iran Bastan, Teheran

## 3.60

Height 31 cm, width 22 cm. Muzé Iran Bastan, Teheran

## 3.61

Height 29 cm, width 15.5 cm. The Metropolitan Museum of Art (38.40.251). See Plate 13 (top)

## 3.62

Height 29 cm, width about 15 cm. Muzé Iran Bastan, Teheran

## 3.63

Height 30 cm, width 20 cm. The Metropolitan Museum of Art (38.40.252). See Plate 14 (top)



3.59



3.60



3.61



3.62



3.63



3.64



3.65



3.66



3.67

3.64

Height 36 cm, width 29 cm. The Metropolitan Museum of Art (38.40.249). See Plate 13 (bottom)

3.65

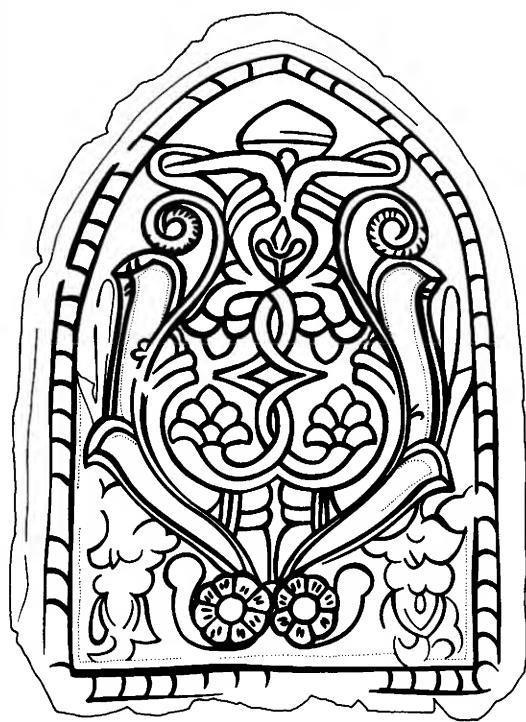
Height 36 cm, width 28 cm. The Metropolitan Museum of Art (38.40.250). See Plate 14 (bottom)

3.66

Height about 19 cm. Muzé Iran Bastan, Teheran

3.67

Height about 22 cm. Muzé Iran Bastan, Teheran



3.68 Height 35 cm, width 27 cm. Muzé Iran Bastan, Teheran. Drawing by William Schenck



3.69 Height 34 cm, width 28 cm. Muzé Iran Bastan, Teheran. Drawing by William Schenck

simple circular flowers, which appear either side by side at the base or in a sprig of three at the top.

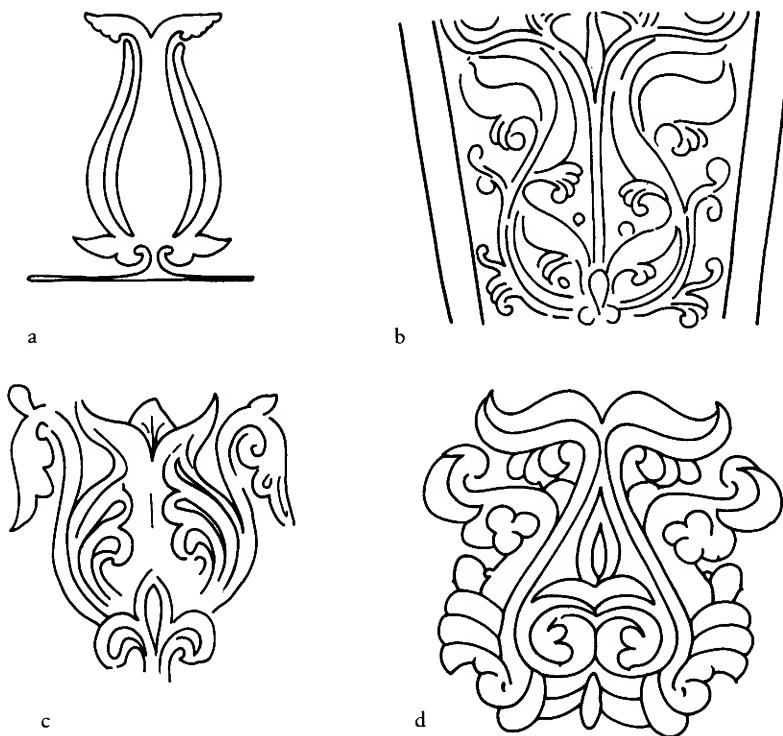
The designs on all of the mukarnas but one (see Figure 3.71) are based on a vaselike motif that was part of a continuous tradition of ornamental design practiced from the Sasanian period through the early centuries of Islam (Figure 3.70). Examples from the Sasanian period are found at Taq-i Bustan (Herzfeld, *Iran in the Ancient East*, pl. xxx; Pope, *Survey 4*, pl. 168). In a most simple form the design is seen in the seventh-century decoration at Piandzhikent (Voronina, “Arkhitekturnyy ornament,” p. 95, fig. 5b). Also in this tradition is a well-known bronze salver in Berlin, with its representation of a “palace” in the center of radiating panels. The salver was long attributed to Khusrav II (r. 591–628; see Pope, *Survey 4*, pl. 237; Ringbom, *Paradisus Terrestris*, figs. 123–25), but J. Sauvaget (“Monuments omeyyades”) has dated it slightly later. And the vaselike motif appears in the Umayyad palace at Khirbat al-Mafjar (Hamilton, *Khirbat al Mafjar*, pl. LXVIII, 2), in the painted designs on the ceiling planks in the Great Mosque of Kairouan (Creswell, *Early Muslim Architecture 2*, pl. 50g), and in the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem (ibid., p. 224, figs. 177–79). Closest of all, however, is a design on ceramic of the tenth to eleventh century from Merv, in Turkmenistan some 300 kilometers northeast of Nishapur (Lunina, “Goncharnoe proizvodstvo v Merve,” p. 244, fig. 15). In the variety of these examples there is nonetheless some general conformity, and certain elements tend to reappear. They show how the motif was adapted for various mediums and used to decorate a number of different shapes, among them—and very successfully—the concave surfaces of these mukarnas.

The vaselike shape of the design is particularly evident in Figures 3.59 to 3.63 and 3.68. Figures 3.59 to 3.62 have in common a black horizontal band of white circular beads at the shoulder, but the last two differ in that a triangle occupies a central position in the decoration. On three others (Figures 3.63, 3.64, 3.68), the body of the vaselike form is composed of interlacing stems that end in palmettes.

The top and bottom of the motif on all the mukarnas consist of pairs of leaves, which, curiously, have been turned into pairs of eyes on three of them (Figures 3.64, 3.65, 3.69). The eyes are set very close together. The outer corners are pointed, but the inner edges are rounded with no indication of a tearduct. In lieu of eyelids, a line drawn around the eye forms a blank surrounding band. The eyes are at the top on Figures 3.64 and 3.69; on Figure 3.65 they peer from the bottom. The pairs of eyes on Figures 3.65 and 3.69, which curve upward at the outer corners, bear a striking resemblance to those of a king in armor on horseback, probably Khusrav II, depicted in a painting found at Taq-i Bustan (Porada, *Art of Ancient Iran*, p. 207, pl. 56).

## 3.70

Vase-shaped motifs from (a) a band of painting on a niche in a 7th-century palace at Piandzhikent (Voronina, "Arkhitekturnyy ornament," fig. 5b), (b) a bronze salver now in Berlin (Pope, *Survey* 4, pl. 237), (c) an Umayyad palace at Khirbat al-Mafjar (Hamilton, *Khirbat al Mafjar*, pl. LXVIII, 2), and (d) a ceramic of the 10–11th century from Merv (Lunina, "Goncharnoe proizvodstvo v Merve," fig. 15). Drawings by Charles K. Wilkinson and William Schenck



It would seem that Figure 3.65 was closely associated with Figure 3.69, forming part of the same area of decoration, because of the similarity in both the shape of the eyes and the central motif of the design, a tulip-shaped form flanked by two half-palmettes. No other instance of a design combining this central motif with a pair of eyes had been discovered until excavations carried out at Merv produced a piece of glazed pottery, a drawing of which was introduced by S. B. Lunina ("Goncharnoe proizvodstvo v Merve," p. 234, fig. 9). This is a remarkable coincidence, especially as some other details in the design are closely allied to other mukarnas from Sabz Pushan.

The incorporation of eyes that appear almost to intrude into the general decoration, as in the Nishapur mukarnas and perhaps even more so in the pottery sherd from Merv (where the eyes are less dominating), strongly suggests that their presence is symbolic. Like the bird's-head motif, this would appear to be the (perhaps unconscious) resurfacing of a symbol employed many centuries earlier in Scythian art: eyes appear with birds' heads on the bronze pole tops cited by Borovka (see Figure 1.138). Why the eyes formed part of the decoration of a particular room at Sabz Pushan remains a matter of speculation. Symbolic eyes do not appear elsewhere in the wall paintings of Nishapur, except in one possible instance: in a strange and intricate geometric pattern in room w20 in Tepe Madraseh (see Figures 1.210, 1.211). The condition of that painting was unfortunately very poor,

but it is possible, if not probable, that pairs of eyes were purposely introduced.

The sprig bearing three circular flowers growing upward from between the eyes on Figure 3.64 is a feature Ernst Herzfeld observed in the decoration of the pilasters flanking the Sasanian arch at Taq-i Bustan. He associated the motifs with the conventional shape of the clubs on playing cards, and he found other appropriately shaped details he took to represent diamonds, spades, and hearts (Herzfeld, *Iran in the Ancient East*, p. 331, fig. 415). Such a cluster of three also appeared in the Sasanian stucco decoration at Umm Zatir in Ctesiphon (*Ausgrabungen der Zweiten Ktesiphon-Expedition*, last ill.). Another of the mukarnas (Figure 3.65) has a sprig of three flowers that emerges from the top of the vaselike shape, but it grows from a white disk edged with pearls and not from directly between the eyes. Furthermore, the flowers are less stiff.

On other mukarnas (Figures 3.59–3.62, 3.66–3.69) two of these circular flowers, with six or seven petals, each touched with a stroke of two, appear at the base of the general design. For this reason a pair of flowers has been introduced in that position in the restoration of Figure 3.64 (Plate 13 bottom). Figure 3.69 is furnished with two flowers at the bottom, and above



3.71

Fragment of a mukarna from Sabz Pushan. White plaster with a design painted in red and blue and outlined in black. Height about 21 cm, width about 25 cm

the eyes at the top there is a small triangle over a row of pearls contained in a narrow black band.

In another location in the mound we discovered the upper part of a mukarna painted in a completely different style (Figure 3.71). Though it has the same color scheme, this piece could never have been associated with the others, and it indicated that there must have been more than one group. The odd fragment has a border composed of a double row of pearls outlined in black. Filling the apex, against a blue background and separated from it by another pearl border, is a trefoil surmounting two curves, one to the left and one to the right. A piece of an earthenware bowl that may also have been an experimental design (repetitive leaf forms painted white and outlined in red against a blue background) was retrieved from the same area (Figure 3.72). These fragments, which show that even in a small site such as Sabz Pushan there was room for decoration in another style, were probably coexistent with the mukarnas from the cellar, or not later than around the end of the tenth century. The mukarnas found in the Fatimid bathhouse in Fustat are considered to be work of the late tenth or the eleventh century. These from Sabz Pushan can hardly be earlier, but there is no reason whatsoever why they should be later.



3.72

Fragment of a bowl found near the mukarna in 3.71. Reddish pottery with a design painted in white and outlined in red on a blue ground. Height about 7.5 cm, width about 10 cm

## Chapter 4

### THE QANAT TEPE



4.1

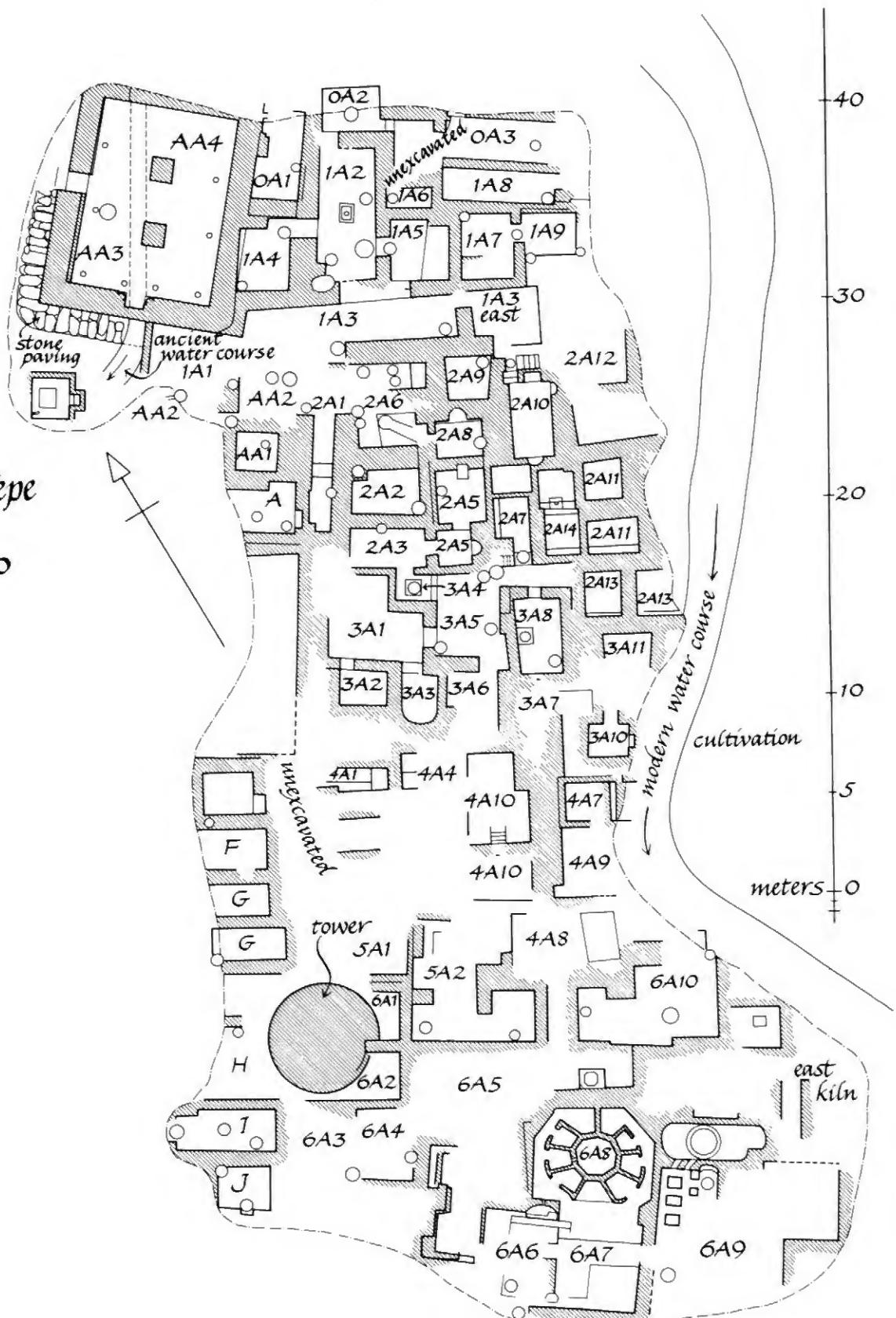
The Qanat Tepe looking over area 1A2, September 22, 1938

IN "A SIXTH JOURNEY in Persia," published in 1911, Sir Percy Sykes marked a large cross on his map of medieval Nishapur and labeled it "ruins of bazaars." A. V. Williams Jackson used the same map in the book he published the same year, *From Constantinople to the Home of Omar Khayyam* (fig. opposite p. 252). Yet when the expedition made a small sondage of the upper level of the Bazaar Tepe, as we called it, in 1938, we found nothing to justify the name. Nor did we discover any signs of ancient bazaars when we cleared the tepe's northernmost limb, a narrow mound of no great size we called the Qanat Tepe because it was riddled with wells and openings into underground aqueducts (see Figure 3.18).

Once again, as at Sabz Pushan, an accidental find had persuaded us to excavate. The headman of the nearby village of Turbatabad, a local farmer whose land adjoined the Qanat Tepe, turned up a block of laminated plaster each layer of which, though firmly stuck to the next, appeared to be painted with colored designs. Excavation of the mound, located just southwest of Tepe Alp Arslan, began almost immediately.

## The Qanat Tepe

1:300



Potsherds and broken brick littered the mound's surface; illicit digging had obviously taken place in the vicinity. The upper level had been hopelessly wrecked, and water from the irrigation channel flowing nearby had damaged what lay below. The excavations at the Qanat Tepe were limited by our inability to extend the digging into the fields of cotton, wheat, and poppies that surrounded the mound, and though we were certain the buildings extended beneath the public path that crossed the spine of the mound on its way to the villages of Turbatabad and Shahabad, that too had to be left intact. Even in the 65-meter-long strip we did clear we were unable to dig below the topmost levels except in a very few places, as we hurried to finish in the face of the encroaching war.

Most of the buildings we uncovered in the area open to excavation were like those at Sabz Pushan, modest dwellings poorly constructed of *khisht* (Figure 4.1). Some of the small rooms had sunken fireplaces, many had wells. In three of the rooms (2A5, northeast end of 2A8, and 2A10), we discovered semicircular niches whose function, as they were not oriented toward Mecca, remains a mystery. Nearly everywhere the walls and floors were covered simply with smooth white plaster.

At the north end of this maze of living quarters, however, near the area labeled AA3-4 on the plan, a fragment of a carved plaster dado survived as proof that at least one room had been more elegantly decorated. Area AA3-4, we soon discovered, was a mosque, and at a low level we found a mihrab painted with bright patterns. At the south end of the tepe stood the most remarkable discovery in the Qanat, a bathhouse where the elaborate murals had been many times renewed. And just north of the baths a round tower built of sun-dried brick rose from the lowest level to stand taller than any other structure in the district, perhaps to serve as a lookout for approaching enemies.

The tower was dug to its foundation. At the base, about 5 meters below the highest point on the mound, a Sasanian coin of 753-66 was recovered, but like the two other Sasanian coins found at higher levels, it must have been a keepsake, for the fill produced an Islamic coin as well. In all, 148 coins were retrieved from the Qanat Tepe, providing a reasonable hint as to the probable dates the site was inhabited. Joseph M. Upton examined and classified the coins:

Sasanian (3rd-7th century)	3	1st half 10th century	1
1st half 8th century	4	2nd half 10th century	12
2nd half 8th century	72	Ghaznavid (11th century)	8
8th/9th century	31	Seljuq(?) (11th/12th century)	1
1st half 9th century	13	Tekish (late 12th century)	1
2nd half 9th century	1	Mongol (13th century)	1



4.2

Plaster figure from the Qanat Tepe. Brown above the waist with groups of four black spots on the belly and sides; traces of black lines below the waist. Height 10 cm, width 6.5 cm, depth about 1.2 cm. The Metropolitan Museum of Art (40.170.141)

The headman of Turbatabad, who had encouraged us to excavate the Qanat Tepe, owned a hoard of silver coins he claimed had been picked up in the area. Of the 227 coins, Upton found that 114 dated to the reign of Nuh ibn Mansur (r. 976–97) and that of these, 64 were minted in Nishapur, Bukhara being a poor second. Most of the others were Buyid, some of them of Rukn al-Dawla (r. 944–77) and minted in Nishapur.

The site produced the usual variety of pottery, with perhaps a more than average number of glazed bowls with radiating lines of slip painting done in polychrome (for example, see Wilkinson, *Nishapur: Pottery*, pp. 137, 139, nos. 19, 20, 27, the last two having the characteristic cable-pattern border on the exterior). A cluster of half-palmettes emerging from a vessel adorned several of the bowls (ibid., p. 131, no. 3, for example); others had sparser decoration that included a tuliplike form on a stalk (ibid., p. 133, no. 5). This same type of ware was found at Afrasiyab (Tashkhodzhaev, *Keramika Samarkanda*, pls. 23, 29, 31). Also discovered at the Qanat Tepe was an interesting bronze bottle with a flared mouth, incised decoration, and a separate cover with a cross-shaped opening that suggested, but did not prove, Christian ownership (Allan, *Nishapur: Metalwork*, p. 76, no. 90). From area AA2 we retrieved a small, headless stucco figure, painted in polychrome, that is unique (Figure 4.2). The partly nude female figure wears a necklace with a modeled ornament at the center.

4.3

Fragment of an inscriptional tile from the north edge of the Qanat Tepe. Carved pinkish buff brick with turquoise alkaline glaze on the surfaces of the letters and dark red paint on the background. Height 17.8 cm, width 17 cm, depth 6.6 cm. The Metropolitan Museum of Art (40.170.662)

### BRICKWORK

Strewn amid the detritus at the northern edge of the mound were wasters and other debris that meant kilns had operated nearby. Potters using one of the kilns must have specialized in making a type of unglazed earthenware bottle, a kind of sprinkler with a nipplelike opening at the top. Several of these vessels, all small enough to hold easily in one hand, were recovered (Wilkinson, *Nishapur: Pottery*, pp. 293–94, 323–24, nos. 109, 112, 114, 115, 117). Most are spherconical; some are decorated with incised designs. One, the most ornamented, is shaped like a fish. Made from hard, impermeable clay fired at very high temperatures, the bottles can hold liquid for months, even if they are left unsealed.

Also found were two slabs of glass, one blue from cobalt and the other with a pale greenish tinge, and several wasters of glazed earthenware, among them a piece of tile that could once have been part of a band of inscription (Figure 4.3). The alkaline glaze applied only to the surface of the letters has turned a brilliant turquoise, no doubt when the piece was coated with copper oxide and fired. The blue stands out against a dark red painted background



made interesting with foliations carved in middle relief. The tile is exceptional, the only example of carved brick decoration we found in any of the Nishapur mounds on which glaze and pigment were both used. All the carved brick at Tepe Madraseh was either fully glazed or colored with paint alone. This unusual tile may represent a third form of decoration. Or, equally likely, as we found no evidence that carved brick, decorative or inscribed, glazed or unglazed, had figured in any of the buildings in the Qanat Tepe, the fragment may merely have been an accident, a waster discarded from one of the kilns.

The kilns themselves were never found. They may have lain beneath the public path, where we could not excavate, or they may have been destroyed sometime before the Museum's expedition arrived in 1935. The presence of alkaline-glazed ware meant the kilns probably functioned until the close of the twelfth century. When they began operation can only be speculated, but we can be fairly certain that by the time the kilns began spewing ill-smelling smoke the neighborhood was sparsely populated, if at all.

#### CARVED PLASTER

In the whole of the Qanat Tepe we discovered but one example of carved plaster decoration. On the northern edge of the mound, at a high level near area AA3, a piece of a carved plaster dado—a curved half-palmette and part of a circular design—remained in situ at the bottom of a wrecked wall (Figure 4.4). So little of the carving survived, and its surface was so badly abraded, that judging its quality or even its style was difficult. This must have been the last level of habitation before the kilns were installed. No one who could afford such elegant decoration would have chosen to live so near a smoky pottery.



4.4

Fragment of carved plaster on the bottom of a wall on a high level in AA3-4



## 4.5

Upper level of the mosque (AA3-4), with a mihrab in the southwest wall and two pillars of baked brick, looking south, August 23, 1938. The hole to the right is a well sunk from a higher level

## WALL PAINTING

*The Mosque*

When we cleared away the topmost layer of rubble from area AA3-4, we exposed what at first seemed to be a large, plain room 7 meters wide with an entrance on its northwest side. Only when we had dug to the next level did we discover that the room had served as a small mosque, for in the southwest wall was a mihrab flanked by engaged columns (Figure 4.5).

As were the walls, the mihrab was built of khisht on a footing of square kiln-fired bricks, and both it and the columns, which survived to a height of 70 centimeters, were coated with thin, smooth plaster. The niche was rectangular in plan (like all the mihrabs we found in the Nishapur buildings), 95 centimeters wide by 70 deep. Placed conspicuously in the center of the wall, like the mihrab in the prayer hall at Tepe Madrashéh, it was far better suited than were the shallow corner niches at Sabz Pushan to serving a congregation, be it large or small.

In the center of the floor, nearly on axis with the mihrab, stood two pillars, each approximately a meter square, of kiln-fired brick. Despite their rough surface, the pillars showed no sign of having been either covered with plaster or sheathed. The four courses of kiln-fired brick that served as the pillars' foundations rested on the plaster floor of the next level, 25 centimeters down (Figure 4.6). In this interval there had been no mihrab. A well (to



4.6

Mosque cleared to the brick floor on the lowest level, looking south, September 14, 1938. The intermediate level, where there was no mihrab, shows on the wall. The brick pillars did not exist on the low level

the right in Figure 4.5) sunk from a high level to the ancient watercourse beneath the room (Figure 4.7) revealed another level some 90 centimeters below. On this level, the earliest, was another mihrab, immediately below the later recess and similarly constructed (again, see Figure 4.6). Piercing the floor near the mihrab wall and the two adjoining it were inexplicable holes 27 centimeters in diameter filled with plaster patch (see plan).



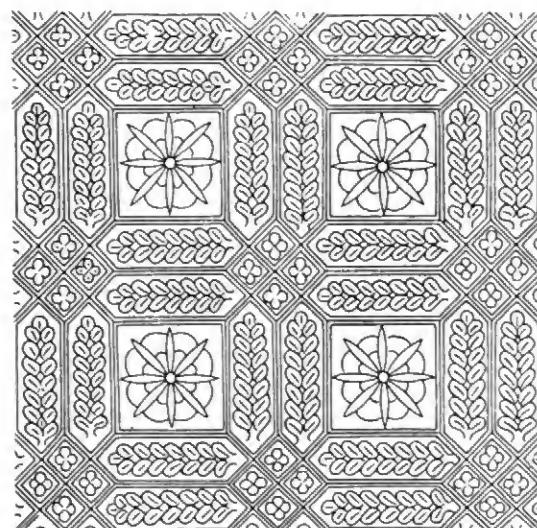
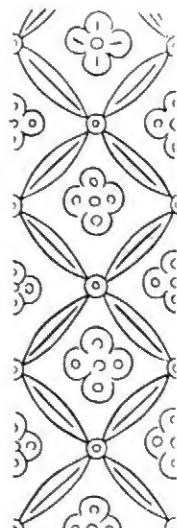
4.7

Ancient qanat beneath the brick floor on the lowest level of AA4, looking southeast, October 1938. Plain hoops rather than brick are used to cover modern qanats



## 4.8

Painted decoration on the mihrab on the lowest level of the mosque. Geometric pattern in red, white, yellow, green, and black. Column survived to a height of about 70 cm. Drawing, at 1:6, by Lindsley F. Hall



When the mosque was first built it had no piers to add architectural interest, yet the room was far from stark. On the wall on either side of the mihrab was a dado of red, surmounted by a 24-centimeter-wide band of green with traces of blue. The band continued around the room, where the rest of the walls were white. The side walls and columns of the mihrab were painted with bright but delicate polychrome geometric patterns (Figure 4.8).

Whether the back wall had also been decorated we could not tell; it was in such poor condition: the wall had been replastered several times and most of the layers had broken away, leaving only some white plaster undercoating. Preserving the painting proved impossible, but fortunately, enough had survived to allow us to reconstruct the designs.

A simple repeat pattern of rosettes and quatrefoils adorned the mihrab's side walls. The columns, set off against the dark red of the walls behind them, had first been given a thin coat of fine white plaster and then covered with an intricate overall design: rosettes outlined in black, with sepals of bright red and petals of white touched with yellow as they narrowed toward the green centers, were set in squares of green separated by elaborate geometric strapwork enclosing leafy sprigs and small quatrefoils. Dividing the pattern were bands of elegantly drawn lines, two red and three black. The delicacy of the work, which is simplified in the drawing, was quite extraordinary, unmatched by any other painted decoration in the Nishapur ruins. Only on a deep level in room H4 near the prayer hall at Tepe Madraseh and in room VI6 at the Vineyard Tepe did we find painting that in any way resembled this (see Plates 3, 4). The function of room H4 remains unknown, but as the painting was not on the southwest wall it could not have been part of a mihrab.

Although the rosettes in the column pattern are distinctive, unlike some of the other Nishapur paintings they are not innovative, for they resemble rosettes in late seventh-century paintings found at the Dome of the Rock and in paintings dating to about 728 at Qasr al-Hayr Gharbi (see Day, "Tiraz Silk of Marwan," p. 44, where a number of rosettes, some going back to the earliest centuries of Islam, are compared). In this Nishapur decoration the number of sepals has been increased from four to eight, which, if somewhat farther from nature, makes an attractive design.

The mosque contained nothing that would have allowed us to establish a definite date for its original construction or for the painting on the mihrab. Nonetheless, on the basis of the coins retrieved from the site we can reasonably assume the niche was painted no later than the tenth century.

### *The Bathhouse*

The layered block of painted plaster the local landlord unearthed in his field resembled Ernst Diez's description, in 1923, of walls he found in Seljuq Nishapur (Diez, *Persien: Islamische Baukunst*, p. 127). Diez believed the eight to twelve layers of painting on the walls to be an indication of how often the site had been wrecked. In this particular assumption, however, he was mistaken.

4.9

Bathhouse complex at the south end of the Qanat Tepe, looking north, October 9, 1938. The tray to the right holds fragments of painting that had fallen from the walls. Note the layers of plaster on the wall to the left



At the southern edge of the mound, separated from the mosque by room after room of living quarters with unadorned walls, we uncovered the room from which the chunk of painted plaster had come. The room was part of a structure whose function was connected not with godliness but with cleanliness: a bathhouse (Figure 4.9). The bath (6A6–9 on the plan) was found on high land at the south end of the mound, not far below the surface. It was unfortunately very badly damaged, but enough remained to show how it had been laid out. The bathers entered a large rectangular reception

4.10

Nine-sided basin (6A8) in the bathhouse complex, looking north, October 19, 1938



room (6A6-7), where they no doubt disrobed. They then proceeded through a wide opening into a room generally octagonal in plan that contained a nine-sided basin at its center (Figure 4.10). The basin, 2 meters in diameter and presumably once breast high, was surrounded by small individual cubicles, eight of which gave a measure of privacy to their occupants, who stood up and dipped water from the basin to pour over their bodies. The ninth cubicle, which had no screening wall, was probably for the servants who kept the basin full. In this and other rooms where water was used, all the surfaces were coated with a hard, water-resistant plaster known as *sarruj*.

A stairway nearly a meter high led from the reception room to a room (6A9) with a raised floor supported by a number of square piers. Hot air was circulated beneath the floor to maintain the desired temperature. In the warmth and comfort of this room, clients lay about on benches, drank sherbet, and gossiped, taking occasional soakings in the adjoining hot-water tank, an oval pool measuring 1.75 by 5.3 meters and generally 60 to 70 centimeters deep (Figure 4.11). The basin sloped downward from both ends to a deeper, circular well, 1.3 meters in diameter, in which one could have stood almost completely immersed. Two furnaces provided the heat, with the flues arranged to carry the warm air under the rooms and to the hot bath (Figures 4.12, 4.13).

A clear plan of the bathhouse complex was never made, partly because



4.11

Hot-water pool in 6A9. Length 530 cm, width 175 cm, depth 60-70 cm, with a deeper well at the center



4.12, 4.13

Furnaces under the floor in 6A9

the area was in so devastated a state and partly because we were unable to finish our exploration of it before we were forced to leave Nishapur in 1940. Some of the description in this chapter is taken from the report of the Qanat Tepe excavations we published in the Museum's *Bulletin* in 1942 (Hauser and Wilkinson, "Excavations at Nishapur").



4.14

Ivory makeup palette retrieved from a drain in the bathhouse. Height 5.1 cm, width 6 cm, depth 1 cm. Muzé Iran Bastan, Teheran



4.15

Pumice-stone rasp found in the bathhouse. Height 5.3 cm, width 7.5 cm. Muzé Iran Bastan, Teheran

From the drains and latrines in the bathhouse we retrieved a number of toilet articles. There were several kinds of small palettes for mixing kohl, which both sexes used to blacken their upper and lower eyelids (we found no traces of henna, but that too must have been used in the bath, again by both sexes, for the dye has long been credited in Iran with providing benefits beyond the merely cosmetic). In one of the drains we found an ivory palette with six circular depressions for cosmetics (Figure 4.14). We also discovered pumice stones of a particularly brutal roughness like the one shown in Figure 4.15. A small bronze hand with the fingers bent downward that was retrieved from the bathhouse was probably used as a scratchback. The hand has a gilded palm, and its back is inlaid in silver with leafy decoration growing from a curled stem; the pin projecting from the wrist had probably been inserted into an ivory rod (Metropolitan Museum of Art 40.170.251; see Allan, *Nishapur: Metalwork*, p. 105, no. 186).

The rooms in the southern part of the bathhouse complex had been covered with murals. The artists had adorned the walls not just with inscriptions and geometric and floral patterns, but with human and animal figures as well. It has always been the custom in Muslim countries to decorate this type of building with greater freedom (see Musil, *Kusejr 'Amra*, pp. 226ff; Herzfeld, *Samarra* 3, p. vii; Creswell, "Lawfulness of Painting"). In Iran, artists had for centuries delighted in representing human beings and other living things, and the iconoclasm of Islam succeeded in restricting this pleasure only in the decoration of places of worship, leaving the bath a free field—even to the extent of allowing the most erotic scenes (though we found no hint of eroticism in the paintings in the Nishapur bathhouse). Strict Muslims condemned the use of public baths, though few went so far as to speak of lice, as did certain Christian monks, as "the pearls of God."

In the fourteenth century a physician put forth an ingenious defense of allowing artists a free hand in decorating bathhouses:

As a man loses a considerable part of his strength when he goes into the bath, every effort should be made to restore him as speedily as possible; so they decorated the bath with beautiful pictures in bright, cheerful colors. They divided the pictures into three kinds, since they knew there were three vital principles in the body—the animal, the spiritual, and the natural. Accordingly, to restore the animal power, they painted pictures of fighting and war and the snaring of wild beasts; for the spiritual power, they painted pictures of love and of reflection on the lover and his beloved, and of their mutual recriminations and reproaches and of their embracing one another, and the like; and for the natural power, they painted gardens and beautiful trees and bright flowers. (Paraphrased from the translation in Arnold, *Painting in Islam*, p. 88)

The mural painting in the Qanat Tepe baths did not offer such comprehensive regeneration of body and spirit, but clients who continued their

visits over several years would have seen a number of changes. The painting was on ordinary white plaster, not waterproof sarruj, and in the moist air of the bath the murals required frequent renewal. When it was felt necessary to repaint a wall, painting was never put directly on painting; the wall was first covered with a completely new layer of fine white plaster. Sometimes two or more layers that had been left white were sandwiched between the colored layers. That the absence of decoration was due to an iconoclastic feeling is improbable. Lack of funds is a more likely explanation. Many a painted and gilded ceiling in the West has been repaired "on the cheap," and in Nishapur itself, at Tepe Madraseh, we found wall paintings and carved plaster decoration covered with plain white plaster, presumably when repairs became necessary. Only in the prayer hall at Tepe Madraseh were there two layers of carved plaster, one directly over the other (see Figure 1.125).

Two fragments of wall painting remained in situ in the bathhouse; all the rest lay in broken masses on the floor. Working in the field, we were unable to separate the many layers on most of these irregular lumps of plaster. On some, however, it was possible to free the layers in limited areas and to make tracings of the paintings in their proper sequence. Walter Hauser did a great deal of this work. His field notes, along with the notes I have added since, on seven series of painting layers labeled A to G and an eighth (series H) that Hauser called the "big series" are assembled in Appendix I. According to Hauser's notes, the big series consisted of thirty layers. But close examination shows that his list must have been a composite of tracings from several fragments, rather than a description of one massive conglomeration of painted layers. The first two layers on the list are on a block of painting that is now in the Metropolitan Museum (see Figure 4.21). Only the top layer of this block was removed; beneath the second layer (shown in Figure 4.22) there remain at least eleven more strata in a solid mass that has never been examined. The third layer in Hauser's big series could therefore not have been directly beneath the second. Certain small groups of layers on the list are clearly true sequences, and in fact there may have been as many as twenty-three layers of painting on one fragment, but on none of the pieces of wall were there thirty. Because the layers were so difficult to separate, and different numbers of layers could be removed from each of the fragments, Hauser must have traced representative designs from many blocks of plaster in order to compile a list of the probable order of the layers of painting.

Hauser's observations are nevertheless a valuable record. At the site, he made tracings of as many of the surviving scraps of painting as he could. Even when the layers could be separated, erosion and salt deposits had often obliterated parts of the paintings. And even when the painting had survived,

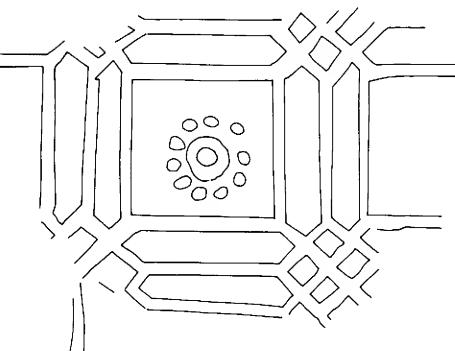


4.16

Gatch room 1 (6A6?) looking west, August 25, 1938. The fragment of painting on the far wall (see 4.17) was one of only two to survive in situ

4.17

Design on the second layer of the fragment of painting found in situ in gatch room 1. White on black. Drawing by Charles K. Wilkinson



the uneven brushwork and careless rendering on some of the layers made the designs difficult to decipher. For reproduction here, Hauser's drawings, and some of mine, have been retraced in ink by William Schenck, to whom I am also indebted for many helpful suggestions as to how best to present the material from the fallen walls of the Qanat Tepe. It should be noted that on all of the tracings of geometric patterns the black lines merely indicate the limits of colored areas. In the original paintings true outlining was used only on plants, animals, and human figures.

We first realized the bathhouse walls had been decorated with painting when we cleared a room we called gatch room 1, where a small fragment still clung to the wall (Figure 4.16). We peeled the layers from this fragment and I made drawings on the spot. The bit of design that survived on the second layer, (Figure 4.17) consisted of a geometric framework of squares with interlacing bands at the corners, painted in white on a black ground. The strapwork resembles that in the painting in the mosque (see Figure 4.8), and it reappears on one of the drawings in the big series (see Appendix I, H17). The ornamental device in the center of each square—a ring of dots enclosing a circle with a dot at its center—seems to have been popular not only with mural painters but with potters who made slip-painted ware. A more elaborate version of the motif decorates several pieces of pottery retrieved from Nishapur (see, for example, Wilkinson, *Nishapur: Pottery*, pp. 139–40, nos. 28, 29, one from Tepe Alp Arslan, the other from the Qanat Tepe, and p. 160, no. 1, a bowl with colored engobe from Sabz Pushan). The

potters of Bust, near Lashkari Bazar, used the same design (Gardin, *Lashkari Bazar*, pl. XXII).

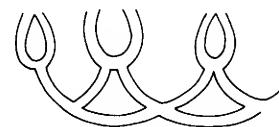
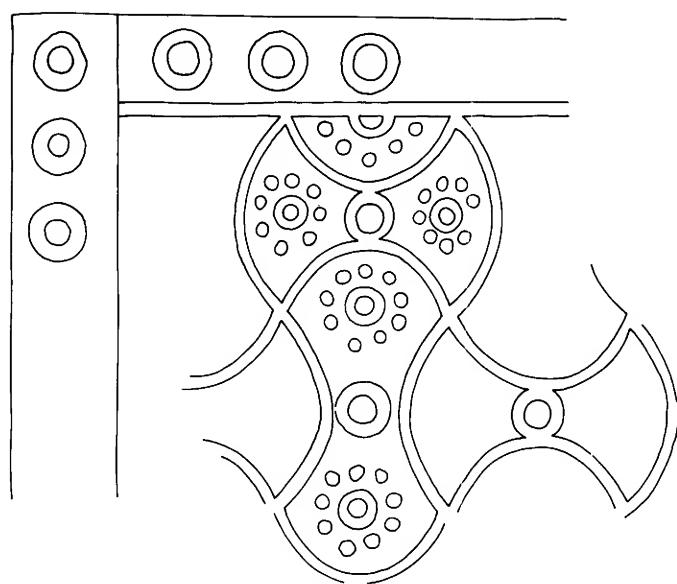
The circular motif recurred in the second fragment of painting found in situ, in another room in the bathhouse complex. The outermost layer was painted plain black, but the painting on the second layer formed a dado 80 centimeters high, above which the wall was white (Figure 4.18). The dado's border of white rings contained an allover pattern of curves and rings encircled by dots. (The motif also appears in Appendix I, C7.) The painting was in white on a red ground, a combination used often in the bathhouse. The third layer of painting was also in white on red, but it was so badly damaged the designs could not be made out.

The fourth layer was in better condition; Figure 4.19 is a drawing of what remained of what seemed to be a dado just over 90 centimeters high, a common height at Nishapur. The pattern is a geometric one of squares with bold white diagonals on a red ground, alternating with squares enclosing the circle-and-dot designs found on the second layer and in gatch room 1. Surmounting the design is a border of "lotus buds" connected by semicircles—the sole motif we found duplicated at other mounds in Nishapur: the same border appears on what is probably part of a white plaster window frame discovered in a cellar at Sabz Pushan (see Figure 1.181).

The rest of the murals had fallen from the walls in chunks (Figure 4.20). Two of the larger fragments were allotted to the Metropolitan. The block

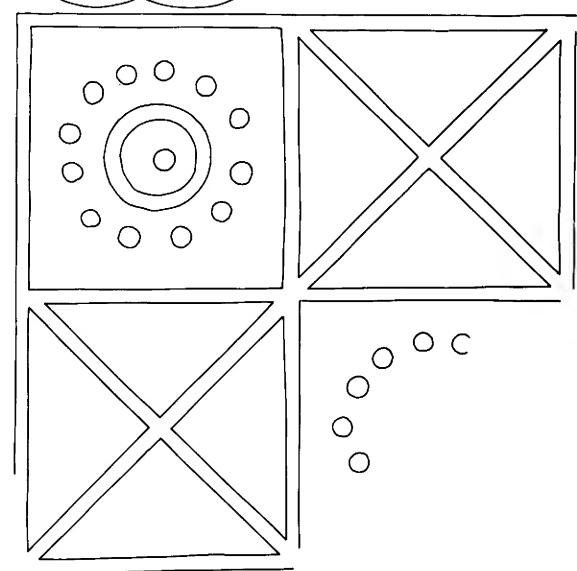
4.18

(below left) Design on the second layer of a fragment of painting found in situ in gatch room 2 (6A9?). White on red. Drawing by Charles K. Wilkinson



4.19

(below right) Design on the fourth layer of a fragment of painting found in situ in gatch room 2. White on red. Squares about 15 cm on a side. Drawing by Charles K. Wilkinson. The fifth layer of painting contained a white diaper pattern on a black ground



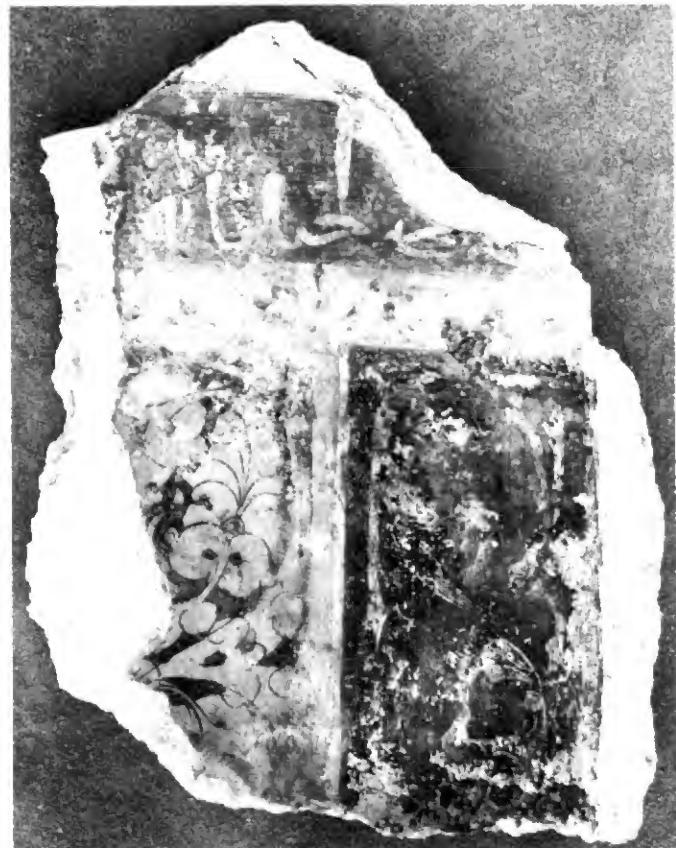
shown in Figure 4.21, a photograph taken at the site, measures 70 by 56 centimeters. The first two layers of this mass of painting, which came from the right-hand end of a wall, were examined and traced in Nishapur. As I have said, there are at least eleven more layers beneath the second layer, which is now the topmost (Figure 4.22).

On the first layer the surface was badly abraded, and the painting was missing entirely from the lower left corner, exposing the second layer. The design is easier to see in the tracing (Appendix I, H1), where minor abrasions and damage from salt deposits have been eliminated. The piece could well have come either from the top of a dado or from higher up on the wall, for it was headed by a horizontal band of inscription, almost completely eroded. The decoration below the inscription was in white on red, the white applied very freely as if with a brush not fully charged with pigment, giving the painting a sketchy quality we found on several other fragments from the bathhouse. The geometric strapwork of the pattern, though somewhat more elaborate, recalls the design on the carved bricks with blue insets found in front of the prayer hall at Tepe Madraseh (see Figures 1.90, 1.91). The larger compartments contained spiral motifs and back-to-back Ss, all with small embellishments. The small circle with four excrescences in the lozenge-shaped spaces appeared repeatedly in these murals, often very carelessly painted, with one point either lacking or longer than the others. The simple dots and rings that fill the smaller compartments were another standard device these Nishapur mural decorators used whenever they thought a space seemed bare.



4.20

Fallen wall paintings in gatch room 2



Nothing could be further from this slapdash work than the painting it covered—the work of an artist who deserved the name. Though it too is surmounted by a band of white lettering on a red ground, the decoration on the second layer is of an entirely different character (Figure 4.22, and see Appendix I, H2). Beneath the inscription a border of spots and rings, painted black on a white ground, surmounts rectangular panels filled with elaborate floral patterns. The narrow right-hand panel is in deplorable condition, but there are signs of curling stems, holding what look like berries, delicately drawn in white on a black ground and framed by black and white bands.

The panel to the left, somewhat better preserved, has a red frame and a black background; the design is painted in a curious dark yellow color, almost burnt sienna, that was used only on this painting. The pattern appears to be some kind of exotic foliage the like of which has never been seen in nature. These graceful, leafy forms mark a decided change from the palmettes that had persisted in Islamic decoration since Sasanian times. Although this artist probably did not invent a style, his use of such surprising shapes is yet another indication that ingenuity was very much alive in post-Samanid art.

#### 4.21

(above left) Multilayered block of wall painting from the bathhouse, showing parts of the top two layers (see 4.22 and Appendix I, H1). Height 70.5 cm, width 55.9 cm, depth 7 cm. The Metropolitan Museum of Art (40.170.702)

#### 4.22

(above right) Block of painting in 4.22 with the top layer removed (see Appendix I, H2). There are at least eleven more layers of painting under the one showing here



4.23

Multilayered block of painting from the bathhouse, showing parts of the top four layers (see Plate 15). Height about 69 cm, width about 87 cm.

The Metropolitan Museum of Art (39N252)

The large, thick block of painted layers shown in Figure 4.23 is also now in the Metropolitan Museum. The fragment, which measures approximately 69 by 87 centimeters, seems to have come not from a dado but from near the ceiling, for the projection at its top appears to be a cornice. The small dark patch at the upper left is all that remains of the most recent layer of painting, and the coats of plaster are so solidly stuck together it is possible to see only a little of what is painted on the second, third, and fourth layers. The second and third layers of painting have a similar border at the top, a repeat pattern of elongated hexagons filled with scrolling lines, the painting in black on a yellow ground with a white line at the edge and red crosslines. This border pattern is different from the others found in the bathhouse, suggesting that this piece may have come from another room. A few other fragments of borders like this were recovered (Figure 4.24). Compartments much like these were included in the paintings at Samarra, which were executed in the ninth century, earlier than these from Nishapur (Herzfeld, *Samarra* 3, pls. XLV, XLVI). There, however, the rectangles are filled more ingeniously, with birds.

On the fourth level of painting on the block in Figure 4.23 some of the general wall decoration remained. Plate 15 is a tracing of part of this layer. To the left is a squat fruit dish painted gold. To the right is a floral form,

consisting of tightly packed pairs of petals at the end of a curving stem, that strongly resembles the imaginative painting on the second layer on the other large fragment in the Metropolitan, although there the blossoms are all one color, have more tiers of petals, and are less stubby, tending to narrow toward the top (see Figure 4.22).

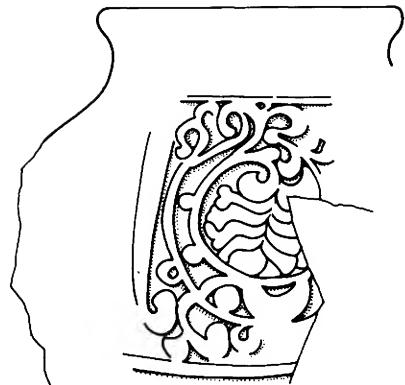
The decorative floral shapes on both these large fragments invite comparisons between the art of the potter and the art of the mural painter in the Near East. Similar tiered petals surround a painting of a falcon on a plate once in Sir Alan Barlow's collection and now in the Ashmolean Museum of Art and Archaeology, Oxford. (See Pope, *Survey* 5, pl. 620, where the plate is dated to the eleventh or early twelfth century, and Lane, *Early Islamic Pottery*, pl. 45C, where it is ascribed to the late twelfth century. Both photographs show the plate after it was restored.) Oliver Watson of the Victoria and Albert Museum, London, drew my attention to an even clearer example: a ewer in the David Collection, Copenhagen, on which there are two of these floral motifs (Leth, *David Collection*, p. 42, no. 35/1965). The ewer has been dated to the thirteenth century. Both the plate and the ewer were made in molds and have decoration in low relief and a turquoise glaze. Both were acquired on the market.

Another turquoise-glazed piece, a cover for a jar or bottle, decorated in



4.24

Fragments of painted plaster with border designs from the bathhouse. Black on yellow and black on white with red borders. Top left: height about 30.5 cm, width about 28 cm



4.25

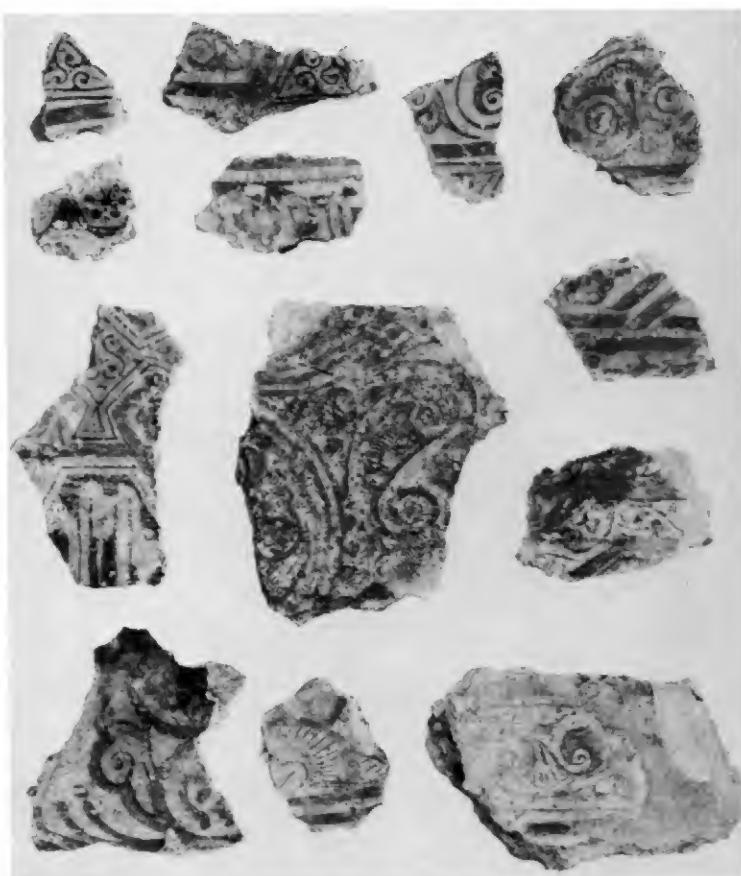
Relief decoration on a molded pottery jar with turquoise-blue glaze from a kiln at Nishapur. Drawing by William Schenck, after Kambakhsh, *Excavations at Nishapur*, fig. 26

4.26

Figments of painted plaster from the bathhouse. Red and black on white. Bottom right: height about 13 cm, width about 20 cm

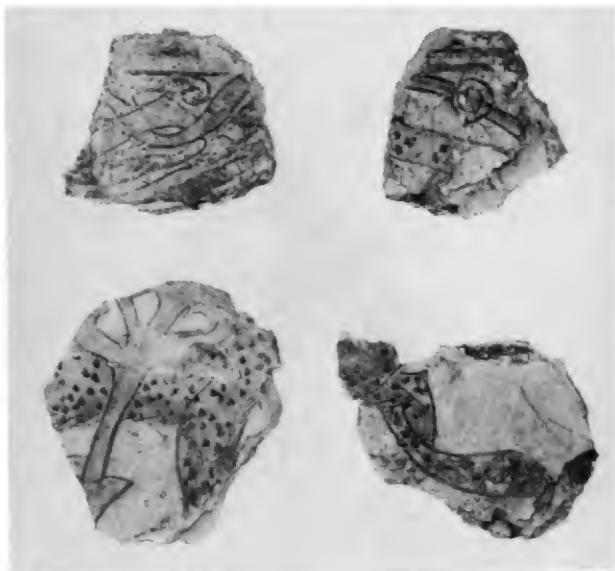
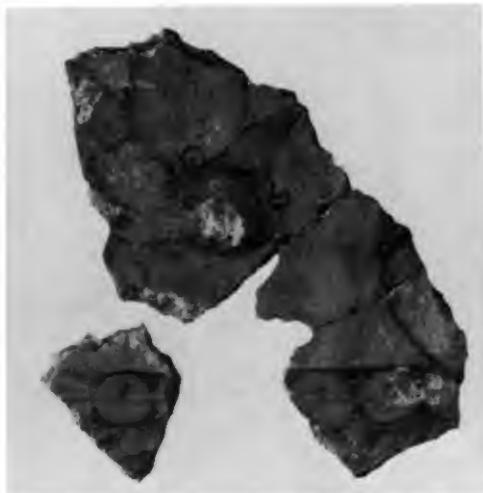
the same style was found in our excavations in Nishapur itself, at a high level in area C9 near the prayer hall at Tepe Madraseh (Wilkinson, *Nishapur: Pottery*, p. 265, no. 10). The same tiered floral motif, though more boldly drawn and pyramidal, appears on the cover, which also has a band of the cable pattern that was so popular with the Nishapur potters and was used on one layer of painting in the bathhouse at the Qanat Tepe (see Appendix I, B1). Another small waster, also part of a lid or cover but with a nearly colorless alkaline glaze, was just large enough to show that the same type of floral motif was used in its decoration (Metropolitan Museum of Art 40.170.578; see Wilkinson, *Nishapur: Pottery*, p. 272, no. 54).

By far the best example of the connection with ceramics, however, and the closest parallel to the layered blossoms found on the painting in the Qanat baths, is seen on the shoulder of a jar found in a Seljuq kiln in Nishapur (Figure 4.25). The kilns of Nishapur were quite capable of producing this type of ware, which was made in molds and covered with decoration in relief and a turquoise-blue glaze. Though there can be no doubt as to its high quality, not a single piece of importance, judging from the labels, seems to have been acquired by a major museum.



4.27

Figments of painted plaster from the bathhouse, showing parts of plants and animals. Red, dark brown, burnt sienna, and yellow-ocher on white, with yellow-ocher borders and black outlines. Bottom: height about 15 cm, width about 30 cm



4.28

(top left) Fragments of painted plaster from the bathhouse. Black and yellow with black outlines. Height as assembled about 31 cm, width about 29.5 cm

4.29

(top right) Fragments of painted plaster from the bathhouse, showing leopards. Yellow and black on white. Bottom right: height about 19.5 cm, width about 15.5 cm

Other fragments of painting retrieved from the rubble in the Qanat Tepe give hints of the variety of decorative forms, both inanimate and animate, the Nishapur mural painters had used over the years (Figures 4.26–4.30). On the second layer on one fragment, beneath a layer painted solid black, was part of a depiction of a building. As can be seen in Plate 16, a bit of an archway remains in a wall of baked brick with a simple bond. The bond changes above the conspicuous band of repetitive pseudo-Kufic lettering, written in white on a red ground, that was perhaps meant to suggest the phrase *la illah illa'llah* (there is no god but God).

The fragments in Figure 4.31 are from a band of inscription written in more elegant Kufic. The mims have been furnished with decorative verticals

4.30

(bottom left) Fragments of painted plaster from the bathhouse. Black, red, and purplish brown on white. Bottom right: height about 17.5 cm, width about 16.5 cm

4.31

(bottom right) Fragments of painted plaster from the bathhouse, showing part of a band of Kufic inscription. Lettering white on black; lines in the border red. Right: height about 11.5 cm, width about 10 cm

in this inscription, which is white with red borders on a black background. On another fragment of painting from the bathhouse (a tracing of which is shown in Plate 17) the lettering repeated the phrase *al-mulk Allah* (sovereignty is God's).

A more striking inscription was incorporated into a large circular design, originally about 60 centimeters in diameter, part of which we were able to piece together from several fragments (Figure 4.32). There is nothing innovative about a circular inscription; the tomb of Mas'ud (r. 1030–40) in Ghazna, for example, has circular inscriptions at its foot (Diez, *Persien: Islamische Baukunst*). The painting on this round design from the bathhouse is in white and black, a favorite combination when pictorial scenes were not being depicted. Three bands, two of rings and dots and one of the ubiquitous rings with four protuberances, form the outer border of the design. In the next concentric band the inscription is painted in white on a black ground, with leafy scrolls embellishing the spaces between the uprights. In defiance of the rules for writing Arabic the letters are all connected at the bottom. Another border of rings and dots separates the inscription from the ornamental center, where the colors are reversed: black on white. Unfortunately much of the design is missing, but it would seem to be either a bird with fantastic plumage (what could be tail feathers resemble those on a bird on a molded, unglazed cup, dated to the twelfth century, that was found in Merv; see Pugachenkova, *Iskusstvo Turkmenistana*, pl. 111) or a formalized version of some plant, maybe a peony. Judging by Hauser's notes, there appears to have been at least one other large circular motif in the bathhouse paintings, and possibly two (see Appendix I, H26 and also Gf).

We retrieved several fragments from the bathhouse with scraps of painting depicting plants and animals. Most were in miserable condition, but among the layered masses was one complete animal, with rounded ears, a pointed snout, and a very short and stubby tail, that seems about to climb a tree (Figure 4.33, Plate 18). The animal, probably a bear (though when it was first published in 1942 it was called a dog; see Hauser and Wilkinson, "Excavations at Nishapur," p. 86, fig. 3), is drawn with great spontaneity in black. The fur is deep red, the muzzle a light violet-gray.

In a less naturalistic style is a drawing of a lion (Figure 4.34, Plate 19). Only the hindquarters and part of the long tail, its tip touching the ground just behind the left leg, have survived. A very unnatural but highly decorative "leaf" with notched edges entwines itself around the stem curving from between the creature's legs. This was the only fragment of painting that appeared to have come from the very bottom of a wall.

A number of birds were traced from the fragments (Figures 4.35, 4.36, Plates 20–22). Most of these birds are difficult to identify. One of them,



4.32

Fragments of painted plaster from the bath-house, showing a circular design with a Kufic inscription. Black and white. Height as shown about 54 cm



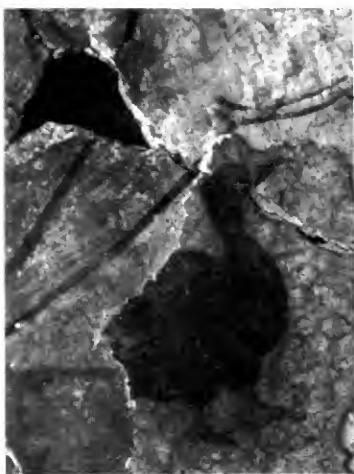
4.33

Fragment of painted plaster from the bath-house, showing an animal, probably a bear (see Plate 18). Height 42.5 cm, width 24.5 cm. The Metropolitan Museum of Art (39N289)



4.34

Fragment of painted plaster from the bath-house, showing the hindquarters of a lion amid curling stems and leafy decoration (see Plate 19). Height about 22 cm, width about 36 cm



4.35

Fragment of painted plaster from the bathhouse, showing a black duck (see Plate 20) on the third layer and a horse's forelegs on the layer beneath. Height of duck about 12 cm, width about 8 cm

4.36

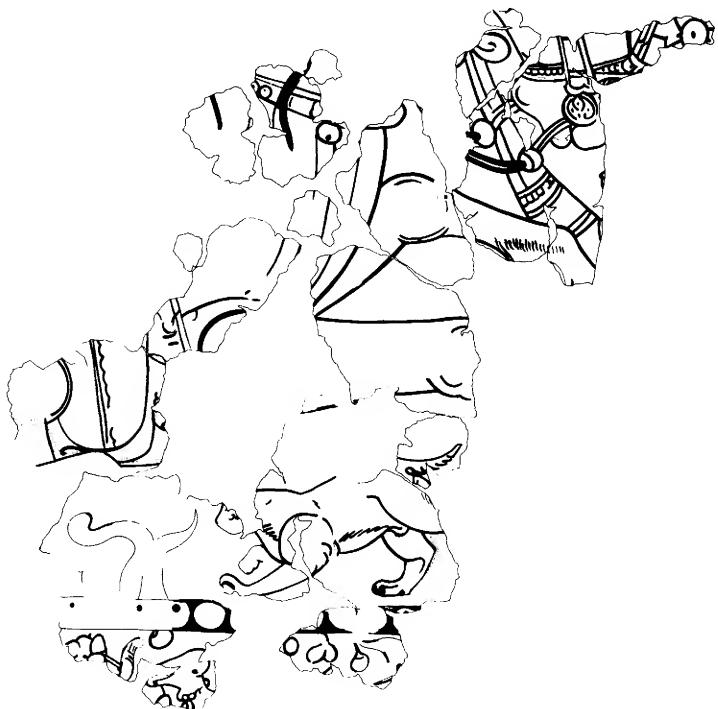
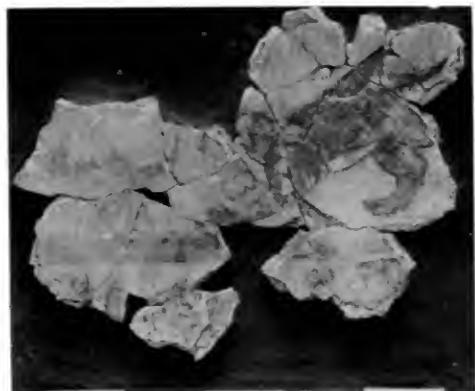
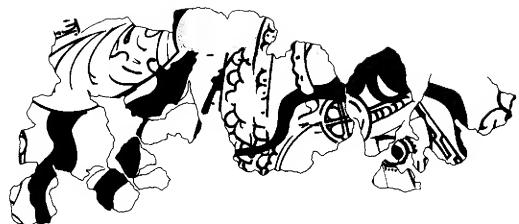
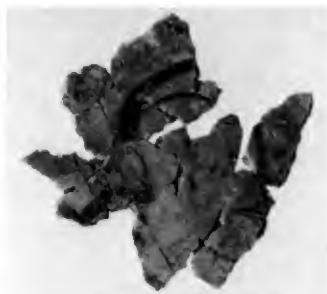
Fragments of painted plaster from the bathhouse (see Plates 21, 22). The bird on the top fragment could be a partridge; the wing on the bottom might be a falcon's



from the third layer of painting, is unmistakably a black duck who has a red beak and red eyes and feet (Figure 4.35, Plate 20; on its fourth layer this fragment contained part of the hunting scene described in the next paragraph). Another, also with a red beak and eyes but with a yellow body, could be a species of partridge that is common in Khurasan (Figure 4.36 top, Plate 21). Another fragment shows the wing and part of the tail of what looks to be a falcon (Figure 4.36 bottom, Plate 22). Birds were also discovered on fragments of wall painting retrieved from the South Horn, a mound to the west of the Qanat Tepe where the excavation was little more than a sondage (Plates 23-25). One of them (Plate 25), with a red body and a yellow beak and eyes, is obviously some sort of predator. (As at the Qanat, the edge of the South Horn became the site of pottery kilns, in this instance for the production of molded, unglazed vessels; see Wilkinson, *Nishapur: Pottery*, p. 330, nos. 161-66.)

By chance, perhaps simply because more of it survived, the fourth layer of painting from the top proved most interesting and gave the best suggestion of the major pictorial scenes that once covered the walls of the bath. Several fragments fit together to reveal portions of what seemed to be a hunting scene: a horseman mounted on a steed galloping to the right (Figure 4.37, Plates 26-28, and see 4.35, which shows the horse's forelegs on the fourth level and the black duck on the third). The painting is on a grayish white ground. The richly caparisoned horse is painted red and has a white flash and a wavy black mane. Its eye is distinctively drawn, with strong black dots to indicate the lashes. Small bells ornament the gilded collar and trappings, and a decorated streamer hangs from the harness.

Above the horse's mane the rider's forearm and part of his pink hand remain. An elaborate armband decorates the sleeve of the hunter's white garment, and forceful black lines indicate the creases and folds at the elbow. Enough remains of his loose white trousers to show that they have a curved hem and a double side seam embellished with a scalloped line. The rider's face, the same pink color as his hand, is somewhat heavy-jawed, but far from the moon face so typical of some Seljuq representations. His nose is delicate and straight. Below the unbroken line of his thick eyebrows, black lines drawn with kohl on the upper lids extend and emphasize his narrow eyes. A mustache, turned down at the ends, brackets his small mouth. Beneath his lower lip is a circular tuft of hair, a common feature in paintings of Central Asia. The man is very probably not ethnically an Iranian. His long, lank hair shows beneath his hat, which is made of spotted fur. A red halo edged in yellow, with a wavy line separating the two colors, encircles his head. Red halos with rims of another color appear in Buddhist and Manichaean paintings (see, for example, *Along the Ancient Silk Routes*, p. 199,

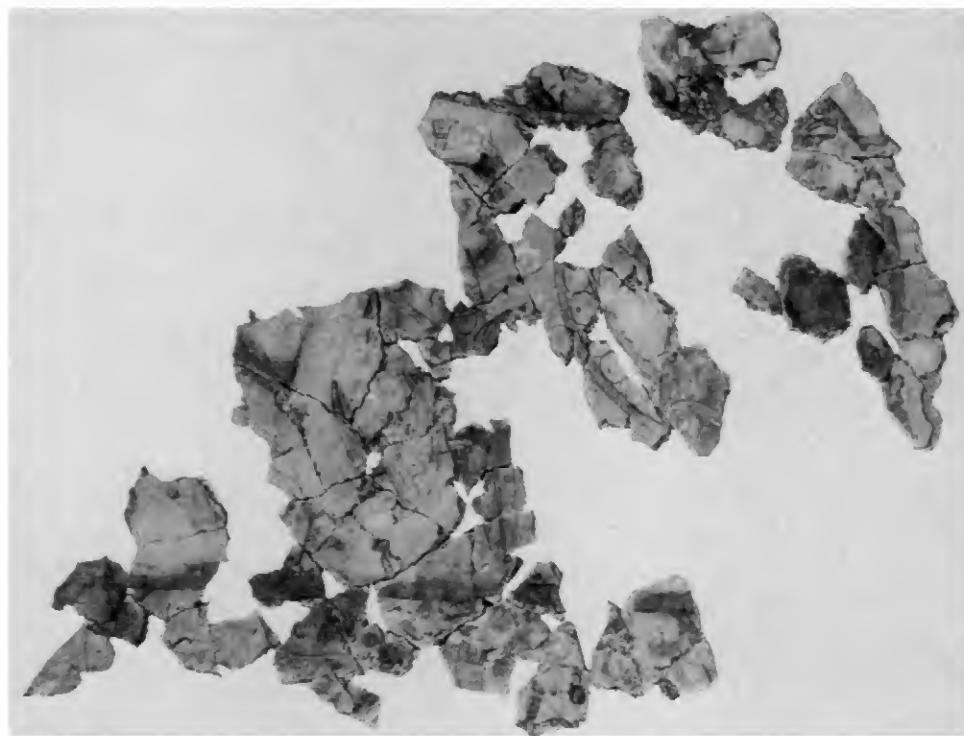


## 4.37

Hunting scene, with a horse and rider, partially reconstructed from fragments of painted plaster found in the bathhouse (further fragments of the scene are shown in Plate 26; see also Plates 27, 28). Tracing, at 1:10, by Charles K. Wilkinson and William Schenck

4.38

(right and opposite) Scene with two male figures, one carrying a shield, reconstructed from fragments of painted plaster found in the bath-house (see also Plate 29). The placement of some of the fragments in the photograph is not correct. Tracing, at 1:10, by Charles K. Wilkinson and William Schenck



no. 140, a ninth-century temple banner from Central Asia that is now in the West Berlin State Museums). The inner wavy line, however, seems to be a touch that is peculiar to Nishapur.

The fragment of painting, also from the fourth level, showing enough of a bird to suggest a falcon (see Figure 4.36 bottom, Plate 22) may have been part of this scene. The rider could well have been depicted hunting with a falcon, like the huntsman in the mural discovered at the Vineyard Tepe (see Figures 2.39, 2.40). At the Vineyard the quarry were clearly hares; here we cannot be sure. The small red animal running in the opposite direction below the horse's forelegs, near what seems to be a desert plant with curved and pointed yellow stems, looks more surprised than frightened. Just what kind of animal this was meant to be remains a mystery. The creature's head looks somewhat feline, but the underside of its tail is rather bushy and its breast and belly are white.

On the wall below the horse and rider there was probably another scene, but all that remains of it on the fragments we retrieved are vague indications of floral decoration. A band of black painted over a coat of yellow to create a series of yellow disks with black centers divides the two scenes. We estimated the height of the lower scene to be 25 centimeters, making the total height of the mural about 2 meters.

Obviously from the same room came further fragments that have the



same horizontal dividing line of black and yellow (Figure 4.38, Plate 29). A colorful scene painted on a grayish white ground once filled the lower panel. Here too the artist portrayed a hunt, but not as sport. Small lions or other felines chase gazelles amid pretty flowers and plants that are more decorative than realistic. The upper panel again includes human figures. In the fragments that could be pieced together portions of two figures were preserved in their true relationship. The figure on the left has a youthful pink face framed by a bright yellow aureola. His black hair seems to descend only to the level of his eyes. His headdress, which appears to be perched above his right temple, consists of quadruple folds of what could be white linen held in place by a yellow horn-shaped ornament—recalling the headdress worn by a youth painted on a colonnette in room IV of the Grand Château at Lashkari Bazar (Schlumberger, “Lashkari Bazar,” pl. XXXII, 2; Gardin, *Lashkari Bazar*, pls. 121, 122). The young man in the Qanat painting wears loose white garments, the folds indicated by curved black lines. His long sleeves are gathered at the wrists. His right arm is incomplete, but most of his left arm has survived: the left hand touches the shield of the figure standing next to him, and enough of the left armband remains to show its three plain concentric sections, of which the center band is painted yellow. In the fragments from the lower part of the painting one can still make out the youth’s knee-high leather boots with pointed toes.

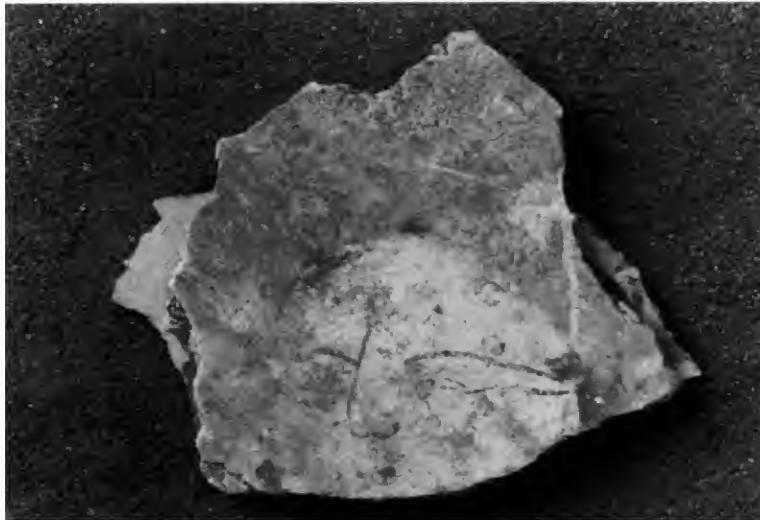
4.39

Fragment of painted plaster from the bathhouse, showing two male heads, one superimposed on the other (see Plates 30, 31). Height about 17.5 cm, width about 27 cm



4.40

Fragment of painted plaster from the bathhouse, showing the head of a man (see Plate 32). Height about 15 cm, width about 19 cm



To the right stands a taller, beardless man who also has short black hair and seems also to have had a yellow halo. The man's nose is outlined in red; his mouth is obscured by what seems to be a spear handle that looks as though it were made of bamboo. His garment, judging by the fragments of his shoulders that remain, is of reddish material; the sleeve is decorated with an elaborate armband with a yellow center and scalloped edges of white outlined in black.

The figure holds what would seem to be a large, round shield. The shield's pale yellow center is unadorned, but its edge is embellished with a bold border of circles flanked by narrow bands of yellow, the outer one plain, the inner scalloped. Judging from the position of the man's body, this would have to be the inner side of the shield, and one would hardly expect it to be so elaborately decorated. Yet had the artist shown only the plain

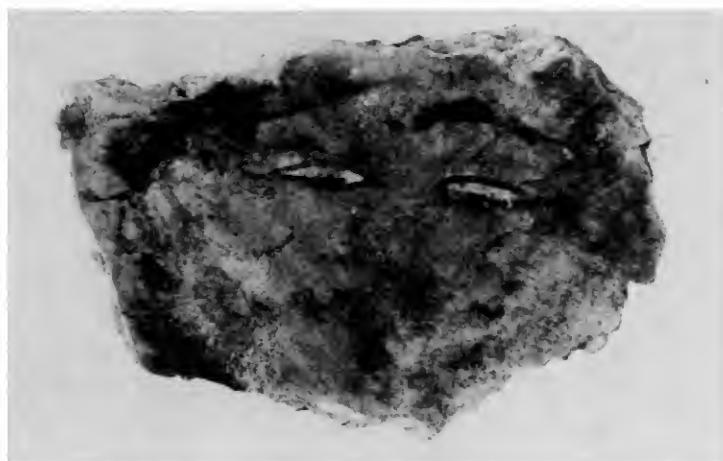
padding, would everyone have known, instantly, that it was a shield? Easy visual identification of what they painted was for centuries of the utmost importance to Iranian artists, just as it was to the Egyptian artists of antiquity, who also depicted the outside of a shield even when the view was of the inside.

Among the fragments retrieved from the bathhouse were four with paintings of human heads that could not be connected with any scene (Figures 4.39–4.42, Plates 30–33). A yellow halo with a scalloped line within it encircles the first head (Figure 4.39, Plate 30). The halo resembles the one on the youth in Figure 4.38, but the face differs considerably. The complexion here is not pink, but the color the English artist knows as “light red” and the German as “English red.” And this is the face of a man, not a boy, for a sliver of his black mustache has survived. Painted on the layer of plaster directly beneath this face was another head (Plate 31), slightly askew but very similar, indicating that the pictorial scenes were sometimes renewed



4.41

Fragment of painted plaster from the bathhouse, showing the head of a woman (see Plate 33). Height about 10.5 cm, width about 16.5 cm



4.42

Fragment of painted plaster from the bathhouse, showing a face, perhaps a woman's. Height about 10.5 cm, width about 15 cm



4.43

Fragment of painted plaster from the bathhouse, showing part of the figure of a man apparently sitting on his haunches. Height about 47.5 cm, width about 55 cm. Tracing by Charles K. Wilkinson and William Schenck



more or less as they were. How different from the hunting scene, where a black duck was painted over the galloping steed when the wall needed renovation.

The head on the next fragment (Figure 4.40, Plate 32), painted dead white on a yellow ground, is very round. The man is bald save for a small tuft of black hair on his crown, and he has elongated eyes and brows. The somewhat similar round face is surely that of a woman (Figure 4.41, Plate 33). An aureola outlined in black frames her light pink face; red lines define her nose and upper eyelids. The fourth face, with a downward gaze, could also be a female's (Figure 4.42). None of these faces bears any resemblance to those depicted on fragments of wall painting found at Sabz Pushan (see Figures 3.51–3.55, Plate 10).

Another human figure, a man seated on his haunches, appears on a large fragment of many conglomerated layers (Figure 4.43). We have no idea who this man was meant to be or in what scene he was incorporated. The man's head and the whole upper part of his body are missing, but some wavy strands of what appears to be a long beard have survived. He wears a red garment with a narrow white sash at the waist. Ornamental swirls of white flow from his body, ending at the right in a particularly striking flourish boldly touched with red; perhaps he is being borne through the air on a fantastic cloud.

### *Conclusion*

Mural art cannot be expected to mirror life, but thanks to a small place of worship and a bathhouse at the Qanat Tepe we have been given a few reflected flashes of life in Nishapur. The subtle geometric painting on the mihrab in the mosque evinces a disciplined quietude that strife and murderous theological struggles presumably could not entirely banish. The bathhouse paintings, where even geometric patterns were interpreted in a free and easy way, reflect yet another side of life, devoted to relaxation and enjoyment. And the Arabic inscriptions in the murals, painted certainly not before the early eleventh century and thus later than the mihrab on the lower level of the mosque, remind us of the dominance of Arabic in Iran for decorative purposes, even in secular buildings.

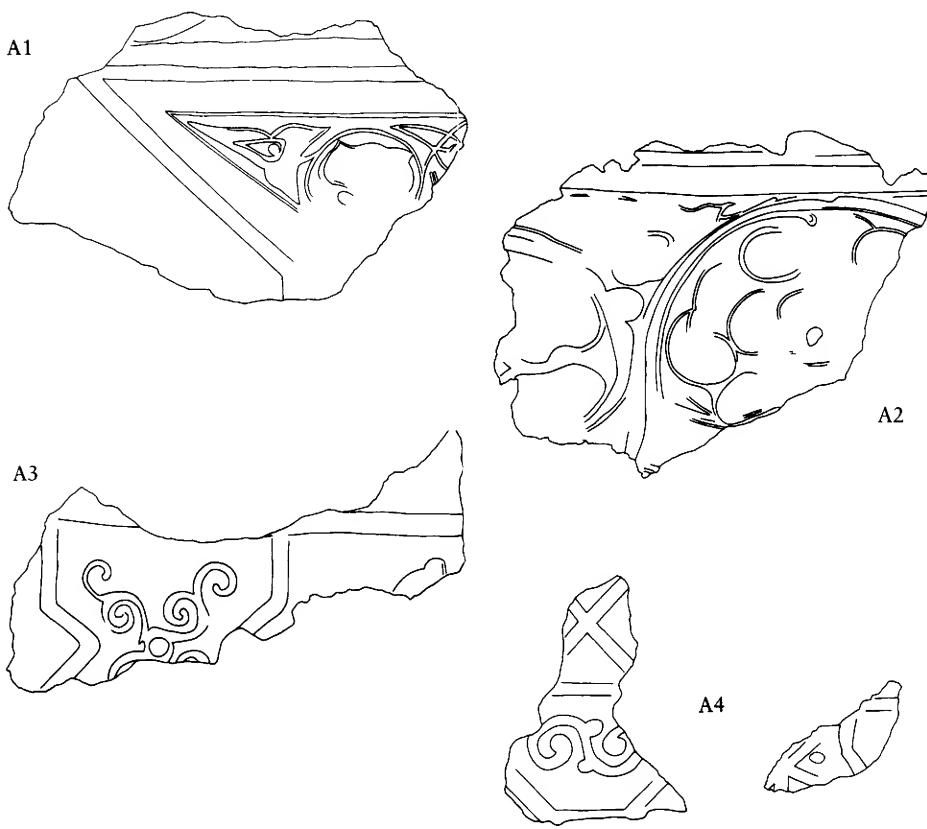
Fragmentary though they may be, these paintings give us another glimpse of the mural art of Nishapur, which had a character all its own. With one exception (Figure 4.8), the wall painting unearthed at the Qanat Tepe is of a different nature from that discovered in the other mounds at Nishapur. Nowhere at the Qanat Tepe did we find the sophisticated symbolism that dominated the painting in room w20 at Tepe Madraseh. And

none of the paintings we found at the Vineyard Tepe, Sabz Pushan, or Tepe Madraseh incorporated ordinary geometric patterning, motifs based on the swastika, or leafy decoration framed in panels like those used at the Qanat Tepe, where they seemed, incredibly, to have been restricted to the murals in the bathhouse. We can only speculate why the painting differed so markedly at each of the sites, just as we can only guess why no scrap of figural painting was found at Tepe Madraseh, where some of the buildings were surely used for purposes other than the worship of Allah and the teaching of Islam. That the paintings complemented the different functions of the buildings they adorned is only a partial explanation and would not account for the variety of facial types represented in the pictorial scenes, even in painting from the same site.

Only further excavation might have answered the many questions that remain. Nevertheless, although the Museum's expedition was forced to an abrupt end and the work can never be finished, from it we have learned much about the art of Nishapur and about life in this important city in the province of Khurasan from the early ninth through the twelfth century. With the two volumes already published recording the pottery and metalwork retrieved from Nishapur, these photographs and drawings of the buildings and what remained of their decoration evoke a cosmopolitan, polyglot city, a famed center of learning, where people of many races and religions lived and worked, inhabiting houses with gleaming white floors never touched by outdoor shoes, using pottery of an elegance superior to that of any made in the West. The site at the Qanat Tepe, certainly not a palace, showed that people of lower rank than rulers in Nishapur lived in an elegant and interesting fashion.

## APPENDIX I Wall Painting from the Qanat Tepe Bathhouse

WALTER HAUSER traced these drawings in the field from layered fragments of painted plaster that had fallen from the walls in the Qanat Tepe bathhouse. The notes on colors and the conditions of the layers are Hauser's; I have added comments on the patterns. Each of the sets of drawings in series A through F represents the layers of painting removed one by one from a single fragment, with the topmost layer listed first. Series G is a miscellaneous group of drawings on which no layers were indicated, and series H was probably compiled from tracings taken from more than one chunk of painted layers. All of the drawings are reproduced at one-fifth their original size. The murals in the bathhouse are discussed further in the Wall Painting section of Chapter 4.



### Series A

1

White on red, blank space to the left red. A pattern of leaves and flowers on curling stems within a triangular extension of a panel of unknown shape (a similarly pointed segment of a panel survives on H19). Further decoration is indicated by a single curved stroke at the top left, above a band 1 cm wide.

2

White on black. A freely drawn design of a leafy nature below two horizontal bands.

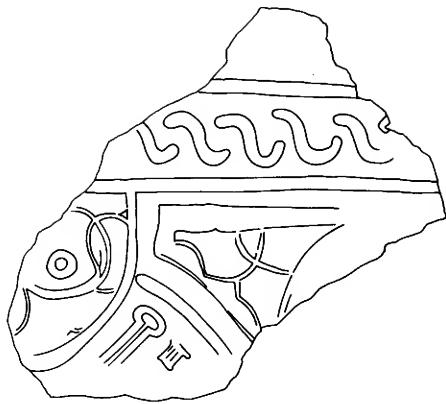
3

White on black, space at the upper right red. A curling design, perhaps based on the swastika, contained within a geometric pattern.

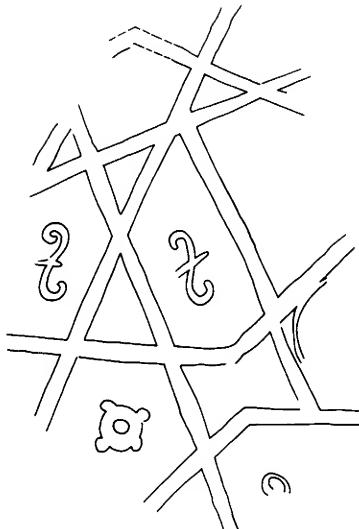
4

White on red. Two fragments of geometric designs, one with a reverse-S motif with rounded protuberances, the other an entirely different pattern incorporating a six-rayed star like that on E2.

## Series B



B1



B2



B5

1

White on red, space above the border black. The fragment appears to be part of a dado topped by a cable pattern, a border used often on Nishapur pottery, especially near the rim on the exterior of slip-painted lead-glazed bowls like some found at the Qanat Tepe (Metropolitan Museum of Art 39.40.7, 40.170.615; see Wilkinson, *Nishapur: Pottery*, pp. 137, 139, nos. 20, 27). Below the border the dado was divided into compartments, but not enough survives to reconstruct the design.

2

White on red. Geometric strapwork enclosing reverse Ss with crossbars and a ring with four protuberances like those on H1 and Gf.

3–4

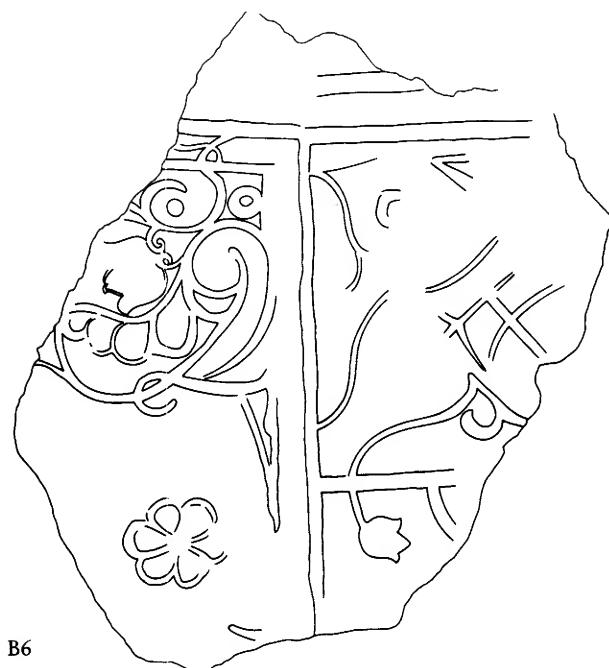
Impossible to record.

5

White on red above and to the right of the wide hatched border, white on black below. A design completely different from those on the preceding layers: an open-heart motif adorns the corner of the rectangular panel at the bottom; at the top left undulating stems with curly offshoots border another rectangle. Between this and the simple geometric pattern to the right is a badly eroded area in which a seven-rayed star like that in C9 survives.

6

White on black in the panel on the left, white on red to the right and in the space above the top border. Rectangular panels bordered in white and containing semifloral forms, the one on the left with an isolated six-petaled flower (though it may be that the paint around the motif has eroded).



B6

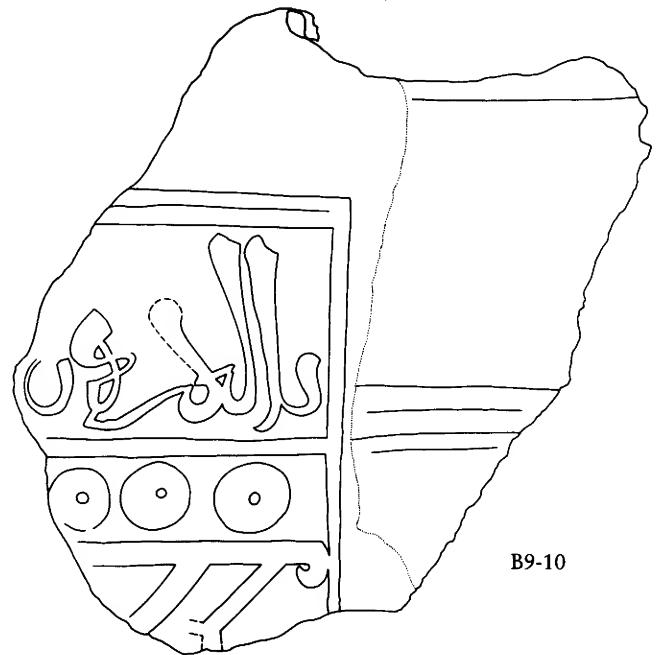
7  
Effaced.

8  
White on red, narrow horizontal and vertical bands black. A horizontal band of writing, in poor condition, above a border of curled motifs that probably extended into the eroded section to the left of the geometric pattern of lozenges. Another version of the "open heart" (see B5) fills the corner of the rectangular panel at the bottom left.

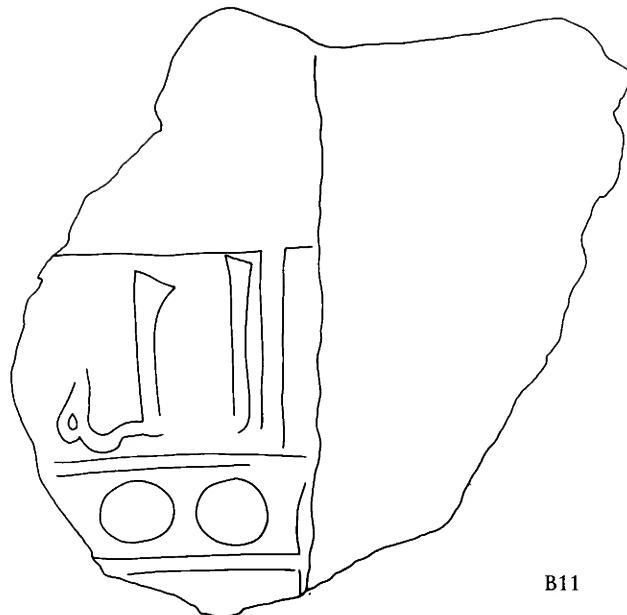
9–10  
White on red. Though it too looks as though it formed the upper part of a dado, the design on layer 9 (the left part of the drawing) has changed markedly. Beneath the few Arabic letters at the top of a rectangular panel is a border of white circles with a central spot of red left in reserve. On layer 10 (the right part of the drawing), only two horizontal white lines survive.



B8



B9-10

*Series B continued*

B11

11

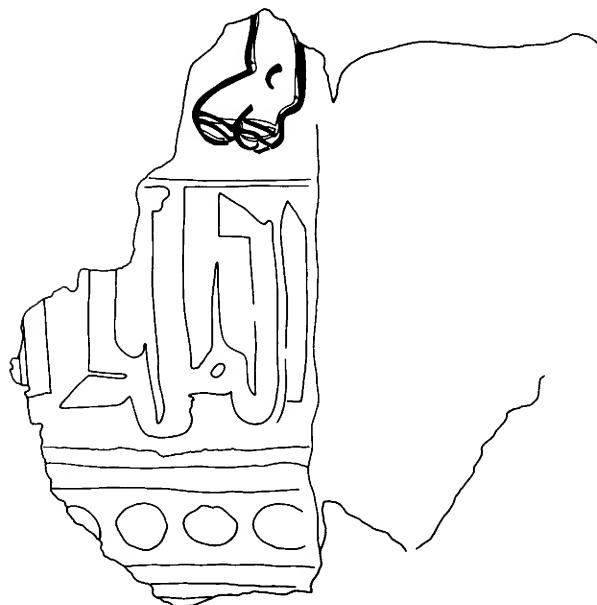
White on red, plain white above the inscription. The bold, undecorated letters, obviously not in the same hand as the writing on B9, suggest the word *Allah*, contradicting the belief that the name of Allah never appeared in so secular an environment as a bathhouse.

12

Plain white.

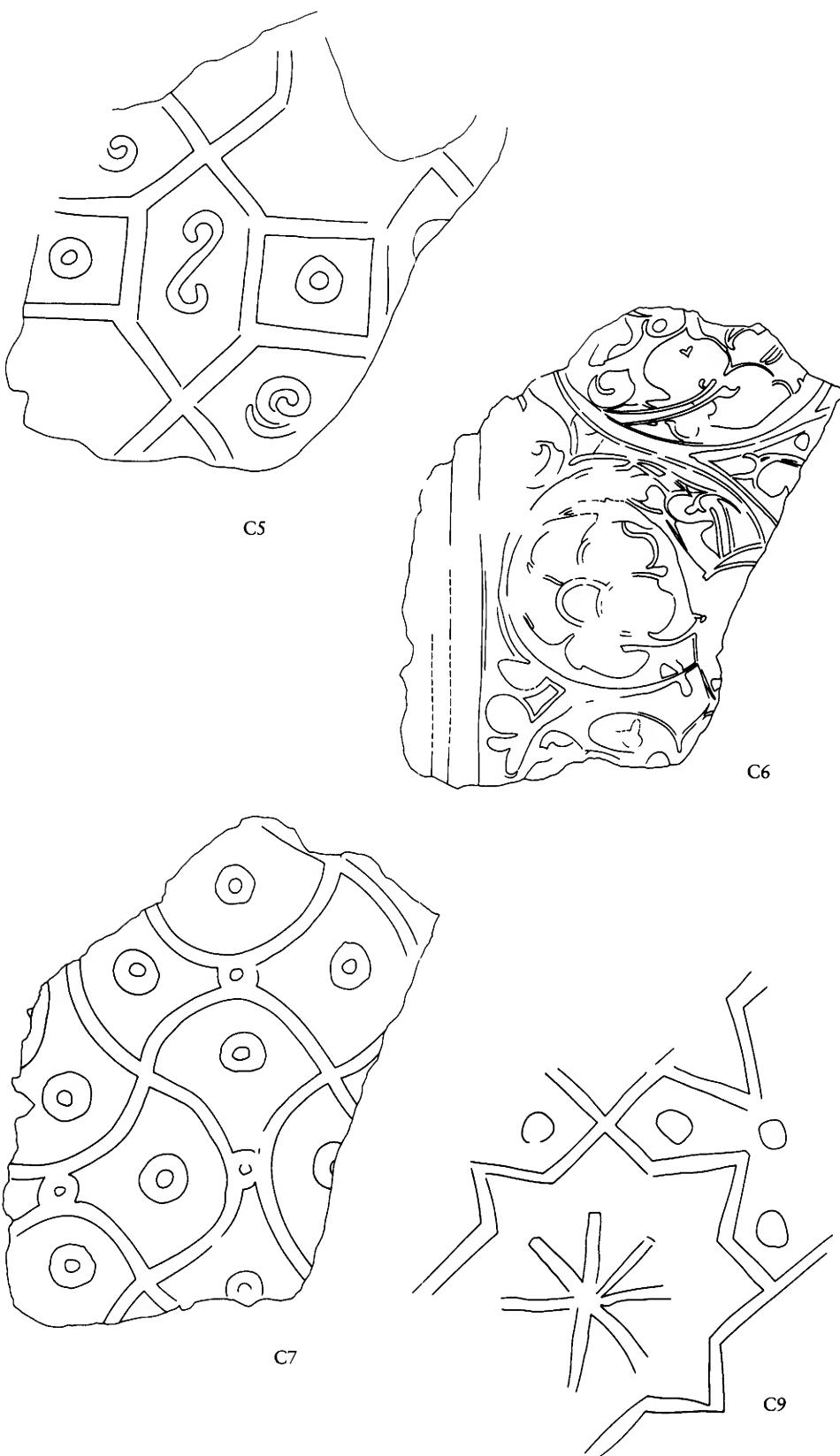
13

Red lettering in reserve on a white ground, border below white on red, animal paw at the top sketched in red, then painted yellow and outlined in black on a white ground. The inscription, again in a different hand, strengthens the suggestion that the word on B11 is *Allah*, for this surely is *al-mulk*, with the bottom of the alif of *Allah* still remaining. *Al-mulk Allah* (sovereignty is God's) was probably the expression used most often by Nishapur potters and other craftsmen to decorate their wares. Above the inscription is a real surprise, the foot of an animal, perhaps a lion, that must have been part of a pictorial scene.



B13

## Series C



1

Black, white, and red.  
Indecipherable.

2

Plain white with patches of ashes and  
plaster.

3

Black and white. A border of circles  
contained in a band and a large circle  
filled with curlicues, all too indistinct  
to draw.

4

Black. Entirely worn out.

5

White on black. Strapwork of small  
squares containing rings surrounded  
by elongated hexagons enclosing re-  
verse Ss.

6

White outline and white fill on black.  
An elaborate pattern on which the  
draftsmanship is far superior to that  
on the layers added later.

7

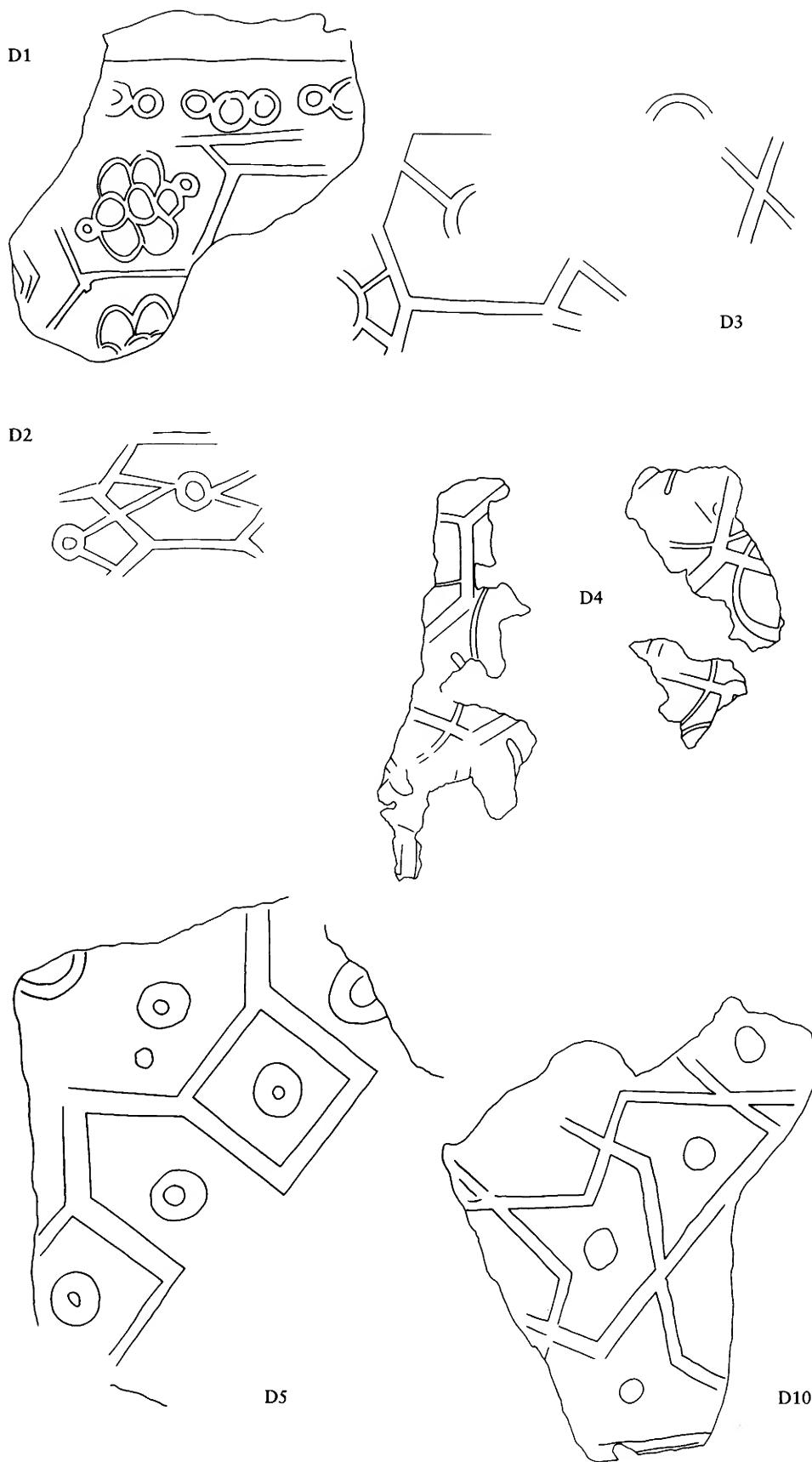
White on red. A network of curved  
lines joined by small rings, with a  
single ring filling each empty space. A  
more elaborate version of this design  
appeared on the second layer of a  
fragment of painting found in situ in  
the bathhouse (see Figure 4.18).

8

Fragments with patterns like that on  
C7. No drawing.

9

White on black. Circle-filled com-  
partments surrounding an eight-  
pointed star enclosing a seven-rayed  
star.



### Series D

1

White on red. Hexagons containing clusters of loops, a design not seen in any of the other painting from the Qanat Tepe baths. The border of tripled circles could have been either horizontal or vertical.

2

White or yellow (perhaps a stain?) on black. A pattern of elongated hexagons, each containing a ring set between the points of two Vs.

3

White on black. An indecipherable geometric design incorporating hexagons and circles.

4

White on black. The scrappy remains of a bold pattern of straight bands against a more delicately drawn design of thinner, curving lines.

5

White on red. Squares joining larger polygons of a type much favored in tilework, with rings used as fillers.

6

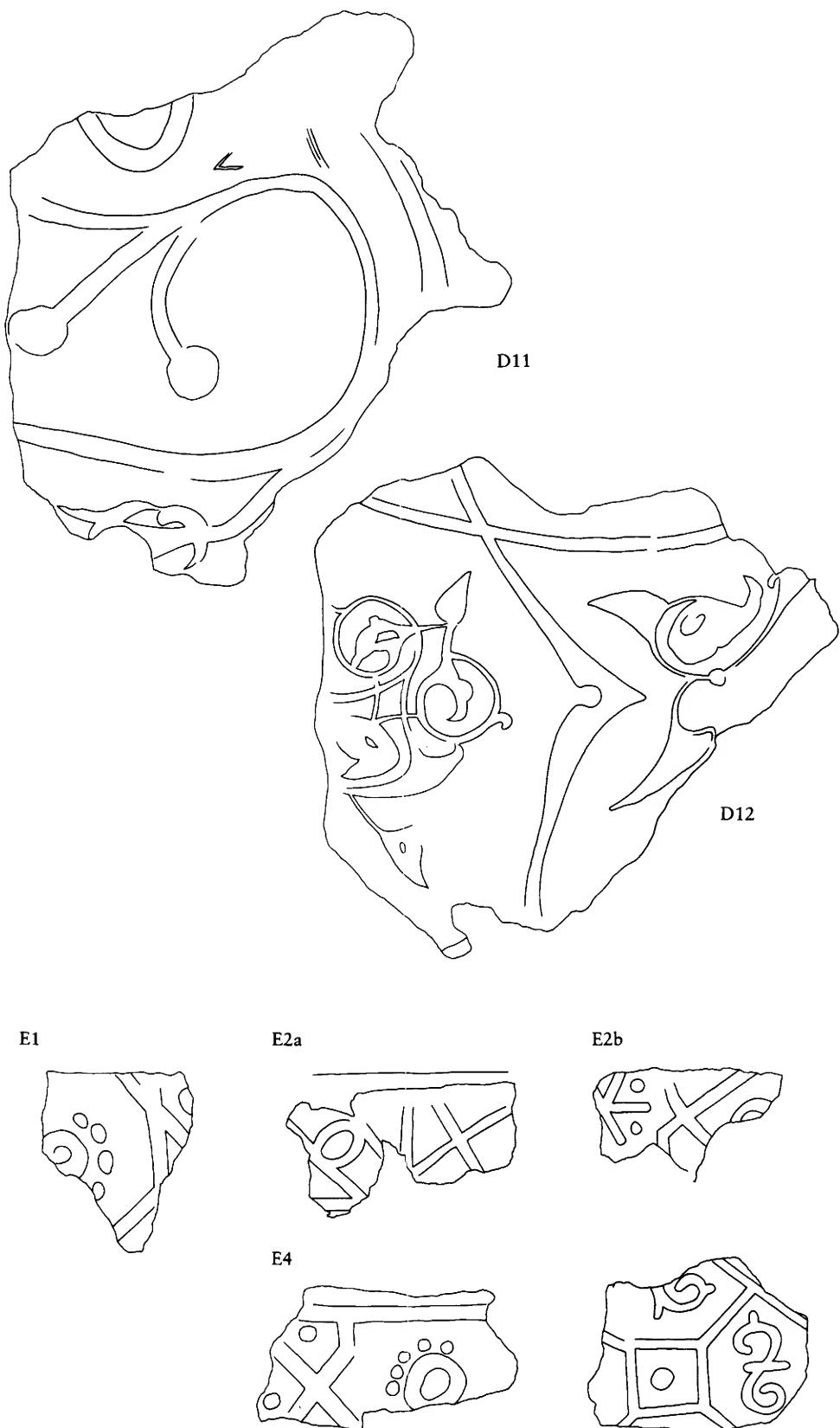
White on black. Crisscrosses with rings, impossible to draw.

7

Plain white.

8

White on black. A geometric design, too damaged to draw.



9

White on red. A geometric design, impossible to draw.

10

White on black. A geometric pattern of polygonal compartments filled with circular blobs.

11

White on black. A curling stem ending in what seem to be berries, a motif apparently not duplicated elsewhere in the Qanat Tepe paintings.

12

White on black. Like D11 and unlike all later layers up to D1, this design contains no straight lines. The intricate motif on the left recalls B8, at least in spirit.

### Series E

1

White on red. A motif of a ring encircled by spots contained in an octagon. The pattern was probably of octagons connected by four-pointed stars.

2

White on red. Two fragments, one with a pattern of squares filled alternately with crossed diagonals and parallel bands joined by rings, the other part of a network of eight-pointed compartments enclosing six-rayed stars (see A4) and probably connected by four-pointed crosses to form a pattern similar to that on Gg.

3

White on red. A border of white circles, not drawn.

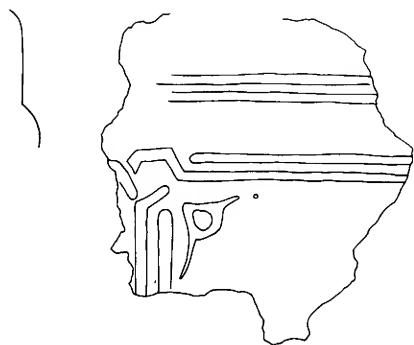
4

White on red. The same geometric pattern as on E2: eight-pointed compartments, in this case filled with a ring-and-spots motif, connected by four-pointed crosses (see E2 and Gg).

(bottom right) No layer indicated. White on black. A square with a spot at its center surrounded by elongated hexagons filled with reverse Ss.

## Series F

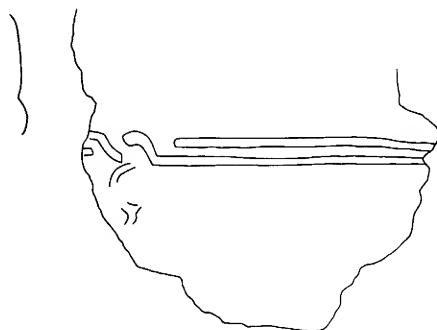
F1



1

Red on white. Signs of an inscription below a simple border of parallel lines. According to Hauser, this layered fragment had a bulge 6 cm below the top edge (see profile to the left of each drawing).

F6



2-5

Plain white.

6

Red on white. Two parallel bands with faint traces of decoration below them.

7-8

Plain white.

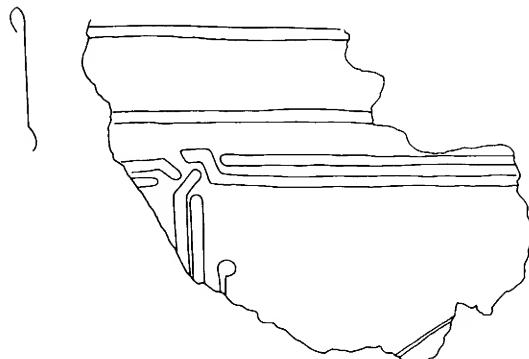
9

Red on white. A single band 2 cm above a pair of parallel bands like those on F6, with traces of an inscription below them.

10

Red on white. Effaced.

F9



11

Red on white. Same as F9, with a plain border. Not drawn.

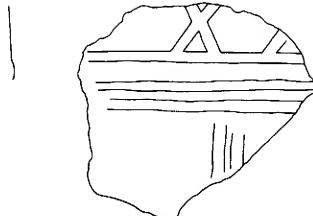
12-20

Plain white.

21

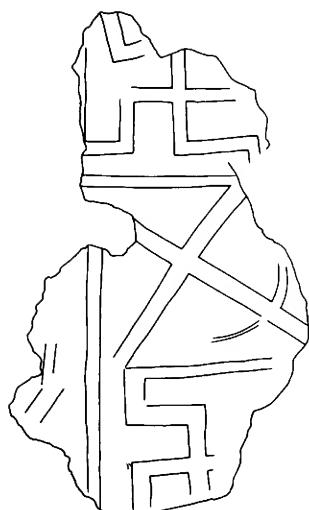
Red on white. A border of hexagons and elongated hexagons above a pair of parallel bands, with a bit of two vertical strokes from the dado below remaining.

F21

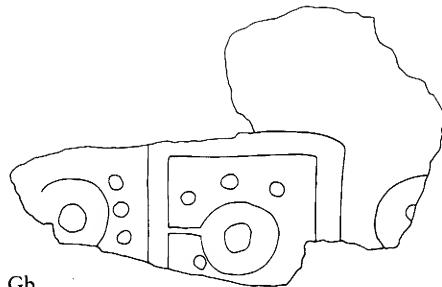


## Series G

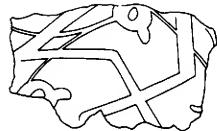
Except on the first in the series, Hauser did not indicate layers on this group of drawings.



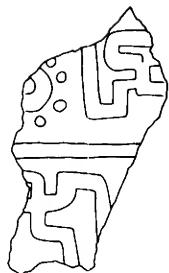
Gc



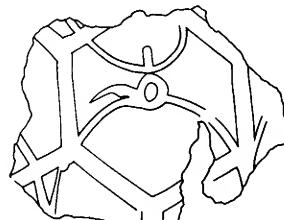
Gb



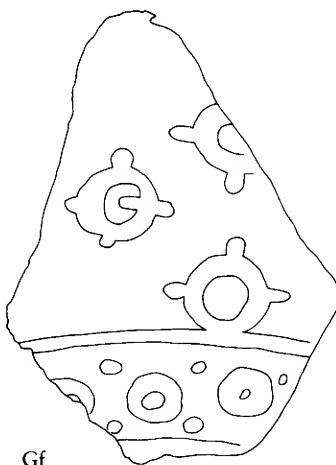
Gc



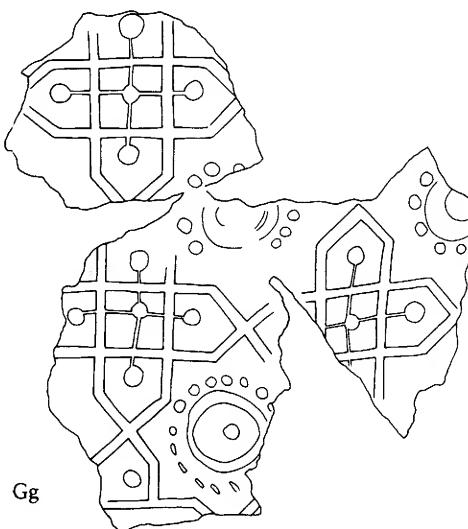
Gd



Ge



Gf



Gg

a  
White on black. Marked "first" (i.e., top). An arrangement of swastikas and diagonal bands.

b  
White on red. Squares filled with rings surrounded by spots.

c  
White on red. Swastikas and rings with a single excrescence connected by narrow interlaced lines.

d  
White on red. Swastikas alternating with rings surrounded by spots.

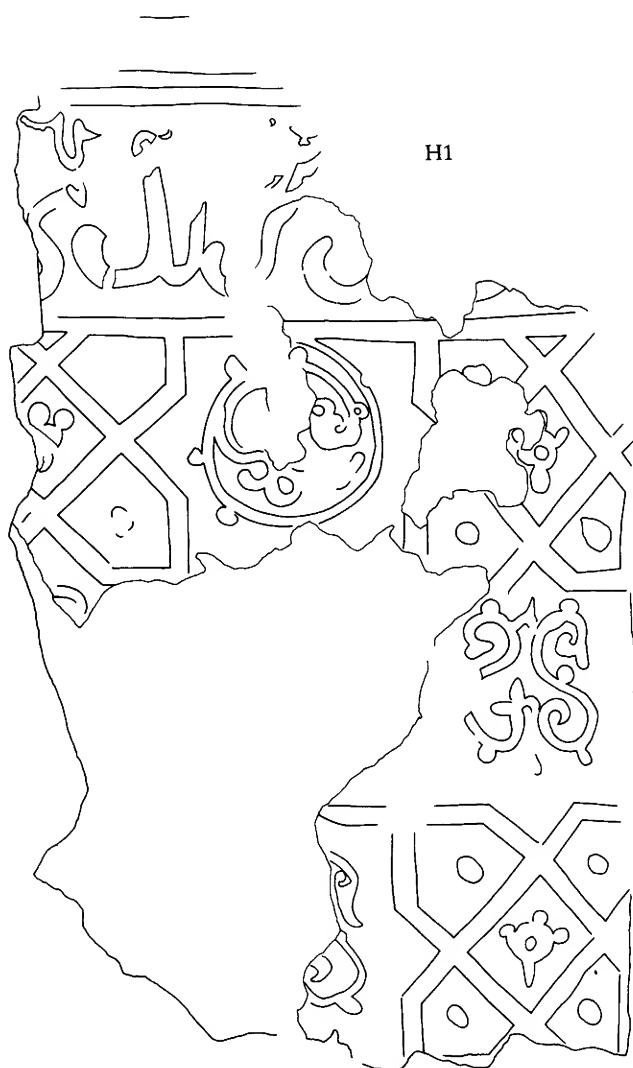
e  
White on black. Curving lines on a network of hexagons.

f  
White on black. A design of rings with semicircular protuberances above a curved band containing a series of rings separated by pairs of spots. The rings with protuberances appear on H1, H2 has the same border, and the general design is very similar to that on the fragment in Figure 4.32.

g  
White on black. Eight-pointed compartments, enclosing ring-and-spots motifs, connected by elongated hexagons that interlock to form four-pointed crosses.

**Series H (the Big Series)**

The big series cannot have been compiled by stripping layer after layer of painting from a single fragment, as the first two drawings are traced from a block of plaster of which only the top layer has been removed. Derived from several fragments, this list must be Hauser's determination of the probable sequence of painting in a particular section of the bathhouse complex.



H1



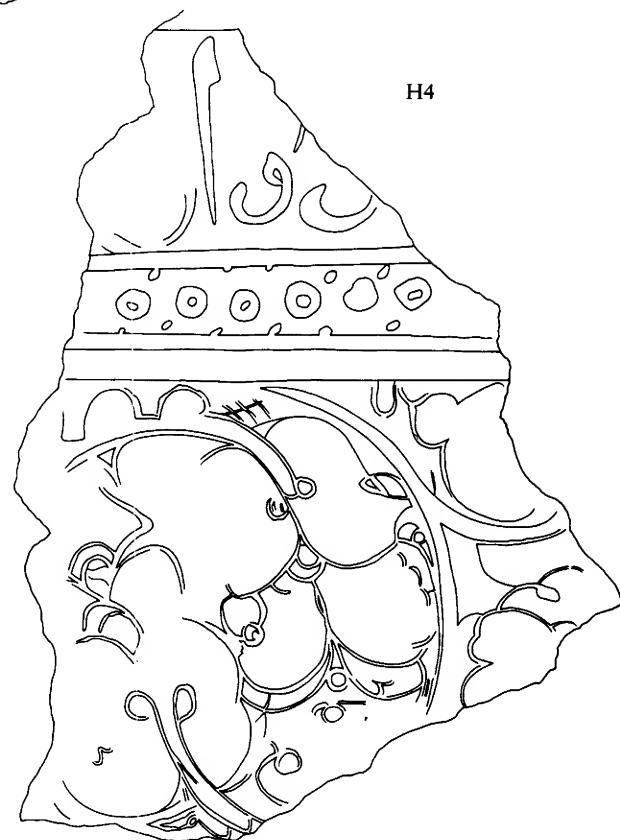
H2



H3

1

White on red. A band of Arabic inscription above a lattice enclosing a swirling circular motif, back-to-back Ss, rings with excrescences, and small spots. This is the top layer of the conglomerate mass of painting shown in Figures 4.21 and 4.22. It was traced and removed.



H4

2

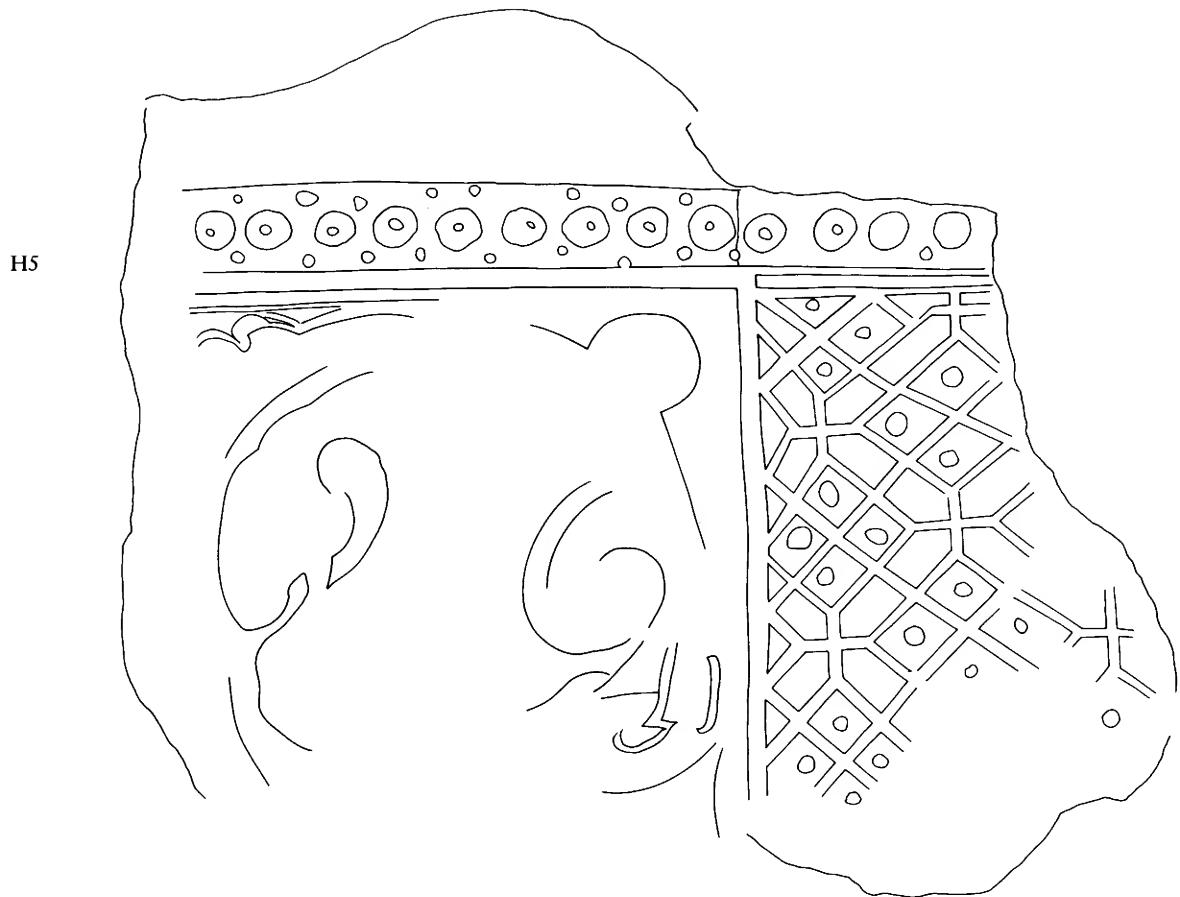
White on red in the band of lettering, black on white in the border below it; left panel dark yellow on black with a red frame, right panel white on black. Here a border of rings and spots separates the inscription from the decoration below, which is divided into panels filled with elaborate foliate patterns. This is the second layer of the conglomerate in Figures 4.21 and 4.22. Firmly fastened beneath it are at least eleven more layers of painting.

3

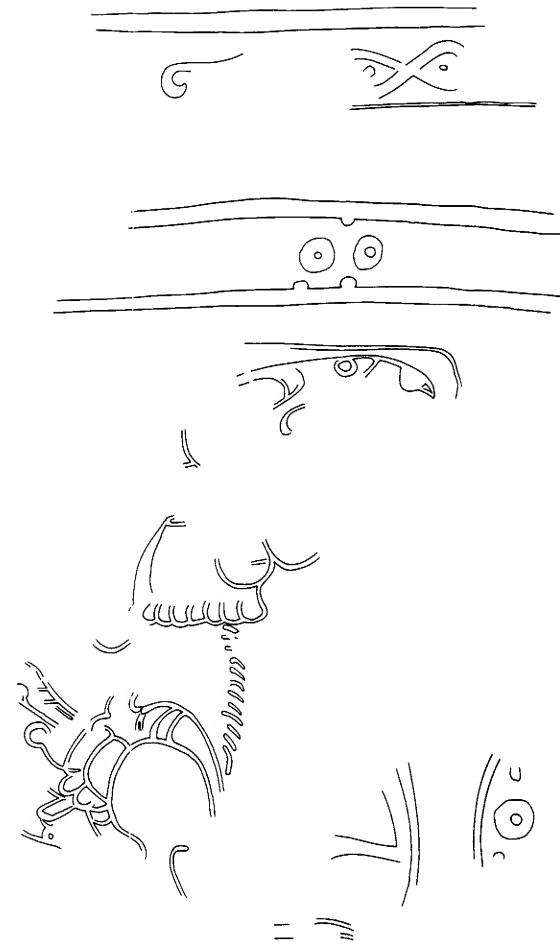
White on black. Not from the same fragment as H1 and H2. A leafy design not unlike the patterns on H2 and H4, but no borders remain.

4

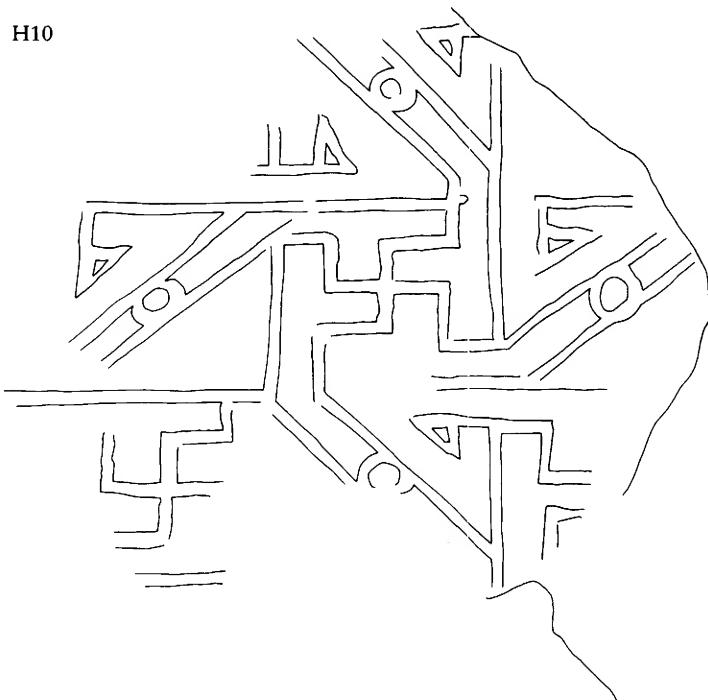
White on black with touches of red in the loops in the painting below the border. Only two neatly drawn letters survive in the inscription at the top, which is in a different hand from those on H1 and H2. The foliate forms that decorate what is left below the border of rings and spots resemble those on H2.



H8



H10

*Series H continued*

5

White on black on the border and left-hand panel, white on red in the geometric network at the bottom right. Two panels of painting below a border similar to that on H4, but the space above is plain white with no sign of an inscription.

6

White on red above the border, white on black on the border and below. A few scraps of leafy decoration above and below a border of rings and lobed bands. Here the lower panel appears to have been triangular.

7

No decoration.

8

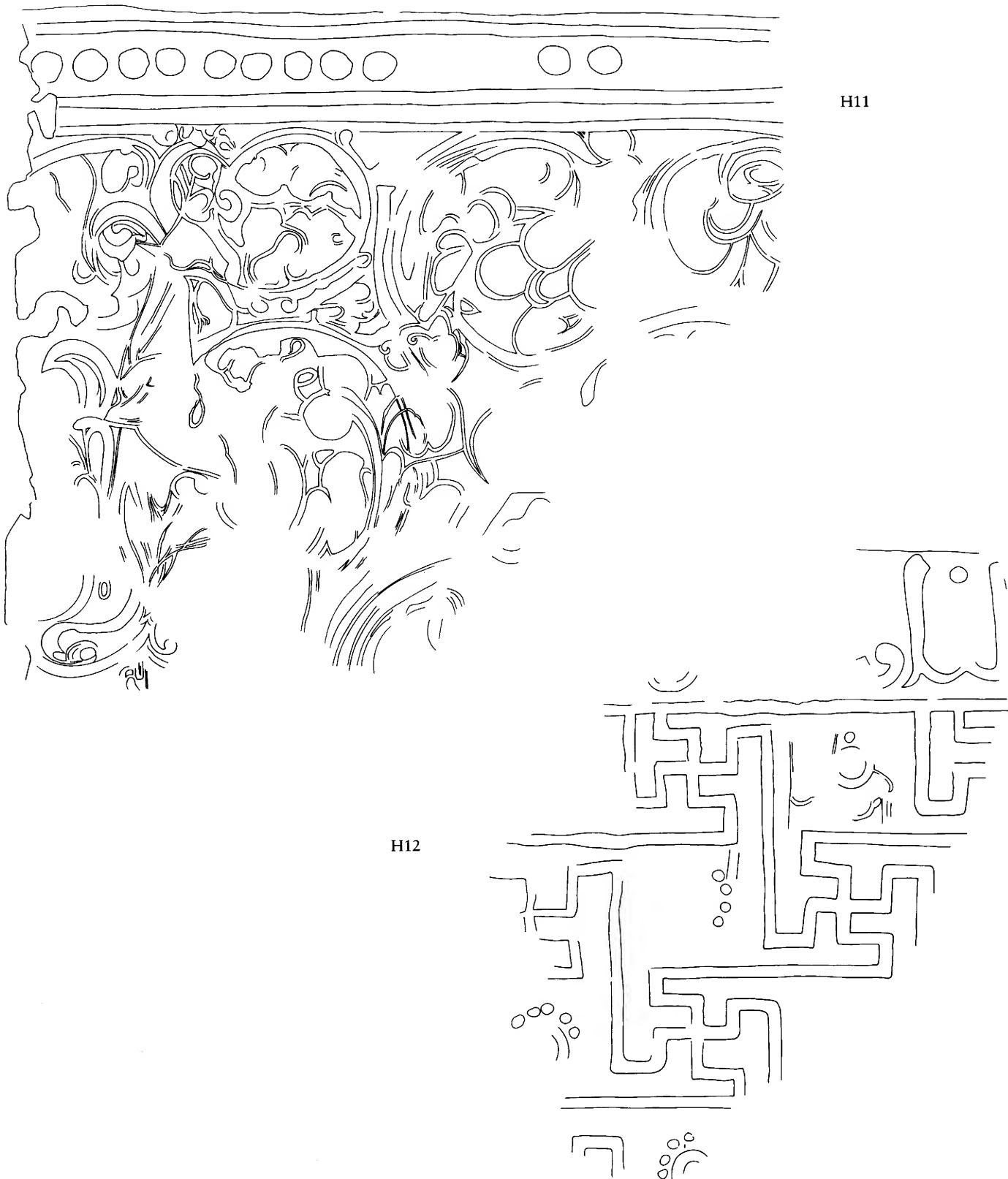
White on black. Two borders at the top, with no sign of decoration in the narrow space between them. The design below has no parallel in the bathhouse paintings.

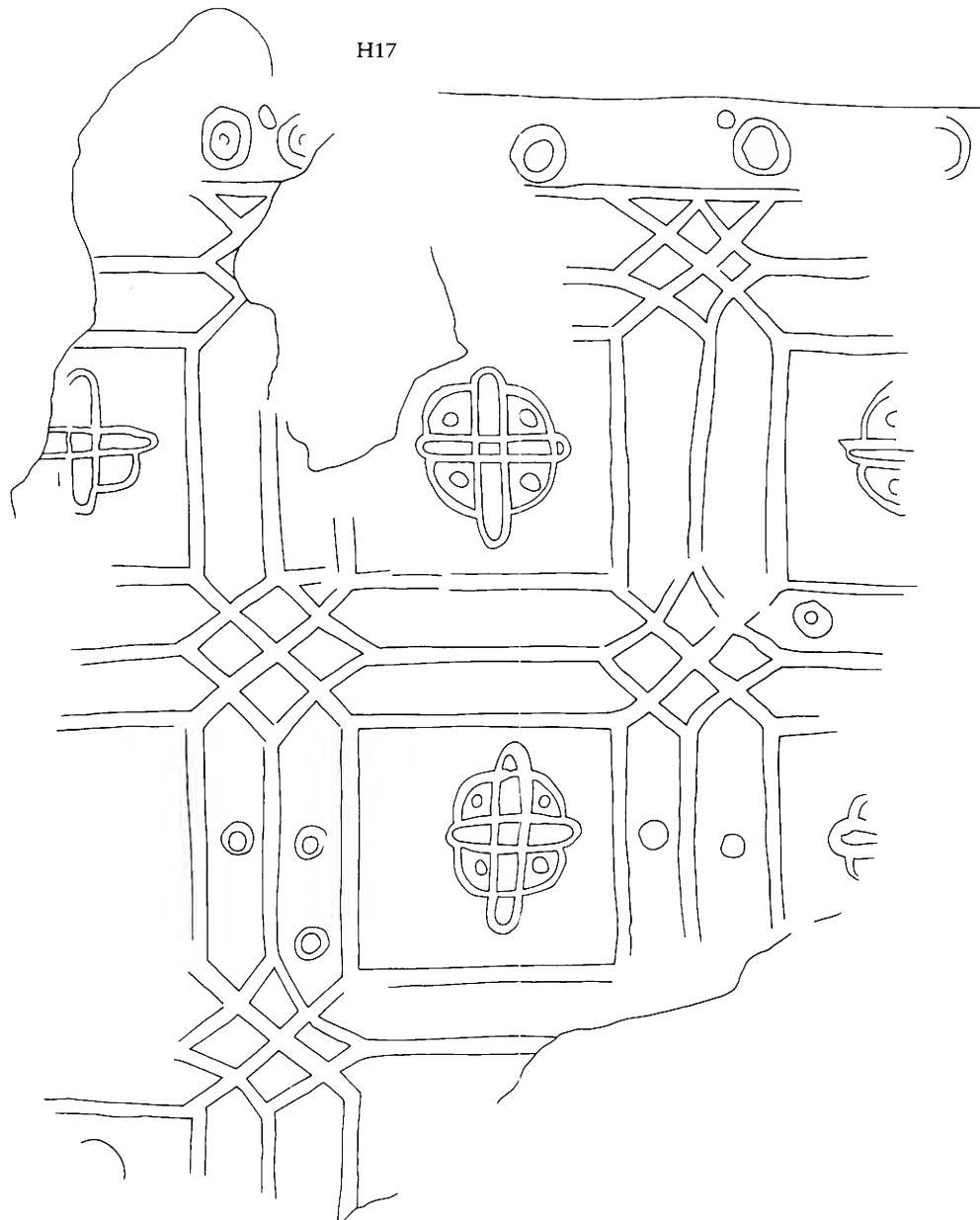
9

White on black, red border at the top. Hauser noted that this layer was crumbly white plaster and mostly destroyed save for a meaningless fragment, impossible to draw.

10

White on black, with traces of red(?). A bit of painting at the bottom of the fragment containing swastikas with their arms extended to make an elaborate geometric design.



*Series H continued*

11

White on black. Below a border of white disks on a black band edged with narrower white stripes, an elaborate foliate design with curving, almost circular stems on which the leaf and flower forms are so damaged as to be without precise shapes. The painting bears some resemblance to that on H4.

12

White on red. Part of an Arabic inscription remains at the top, above swastikas arranged in a pattern different from that on H10, forming square spaces filled with rings encircled by spots (a design similar to that on Gd).

13

Plain white.

14

White on black. Scrolls and floral designs so thin they were impossible to trace.

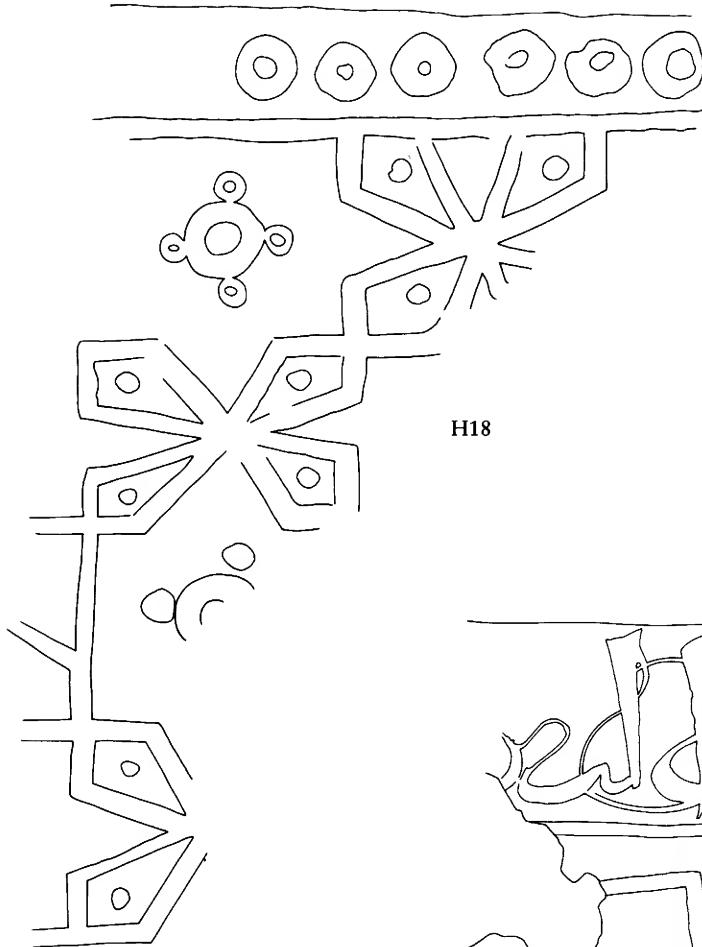
15–16

Plain white.

17

White on black, plain white above the border. Below a border of rings and spots, an intricate geometric pattern of squares separated by interlaced strapwork not unlike that on Figures 4.8 and 4.17. The ornamental devices filling the squares appear on no other layer of painting.

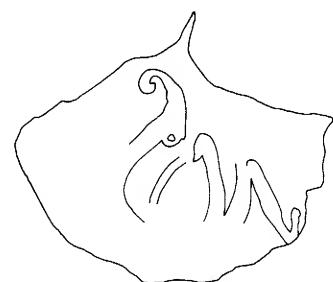
505



H18



H19



*Series H continued*

18

White on black. A top border of white rings on a black band; beneath it geometric strapwork of stars and lozenges enclosing disks encircled by rings or spots, with the smaller compartments containing single rings or spots.

19

White on black with red in the small triangle at the right, just below the inscription. An inscription listing good wishes in flowing Arabic atop one rectangular and two triangular panels, the bottom and left of which are in poor condition and badly eroded.

20-21

Plain white.

22

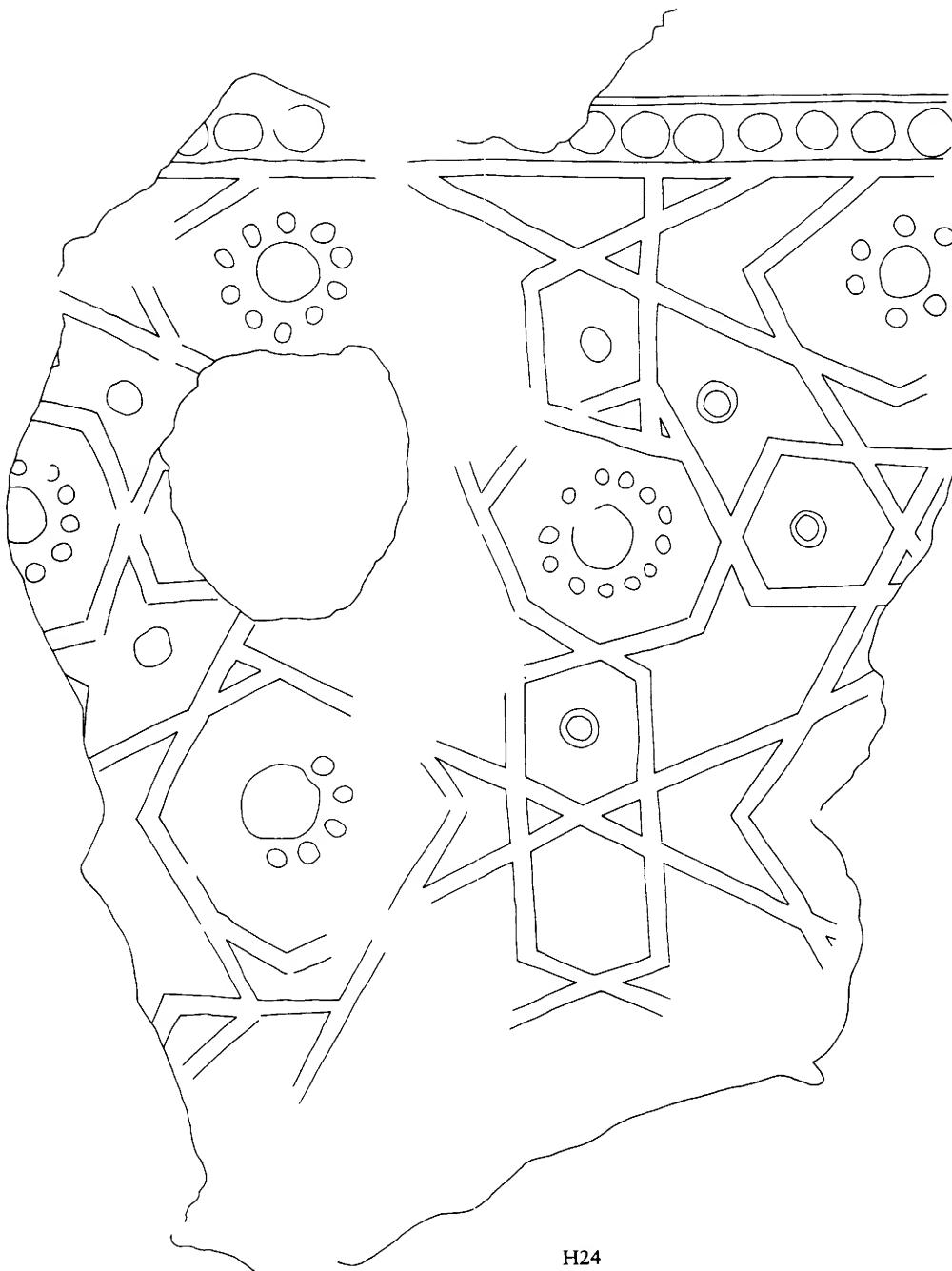
White on black. Eroded.

23

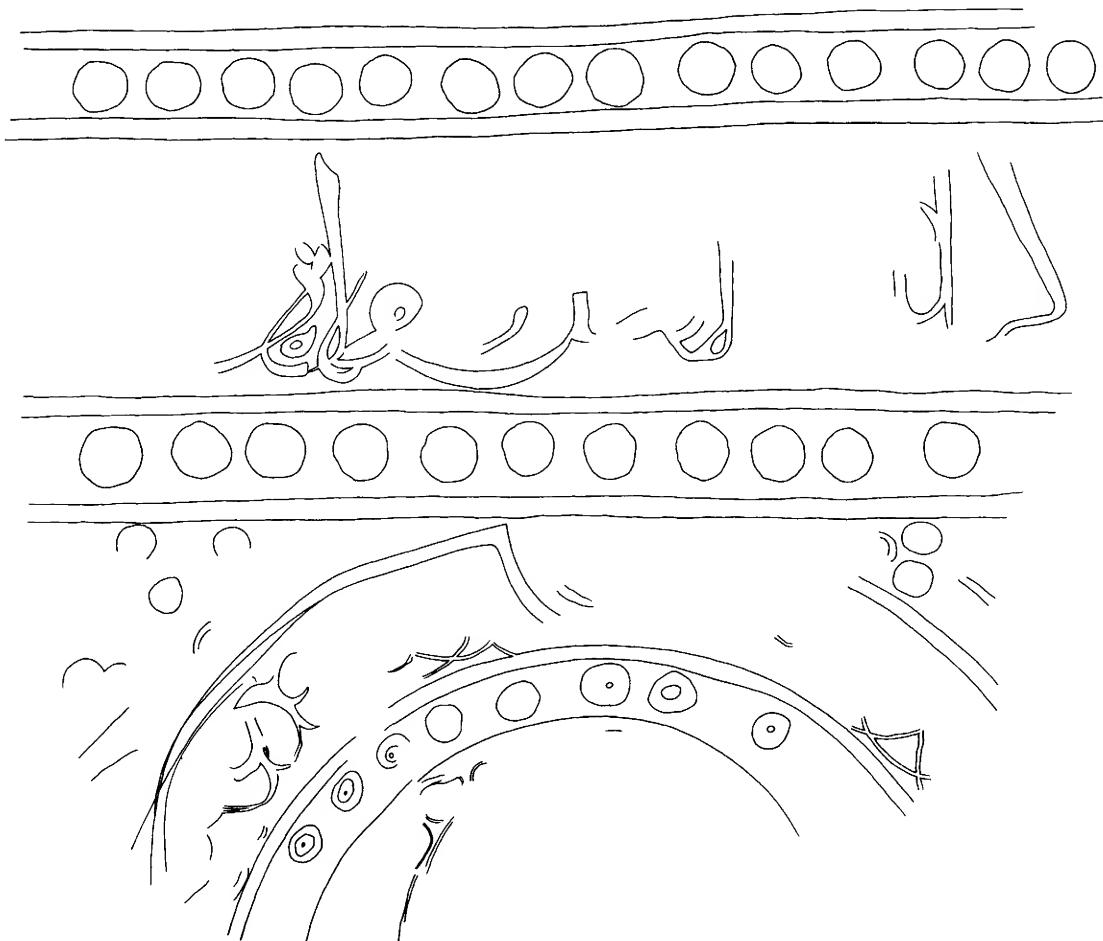
Plain white.

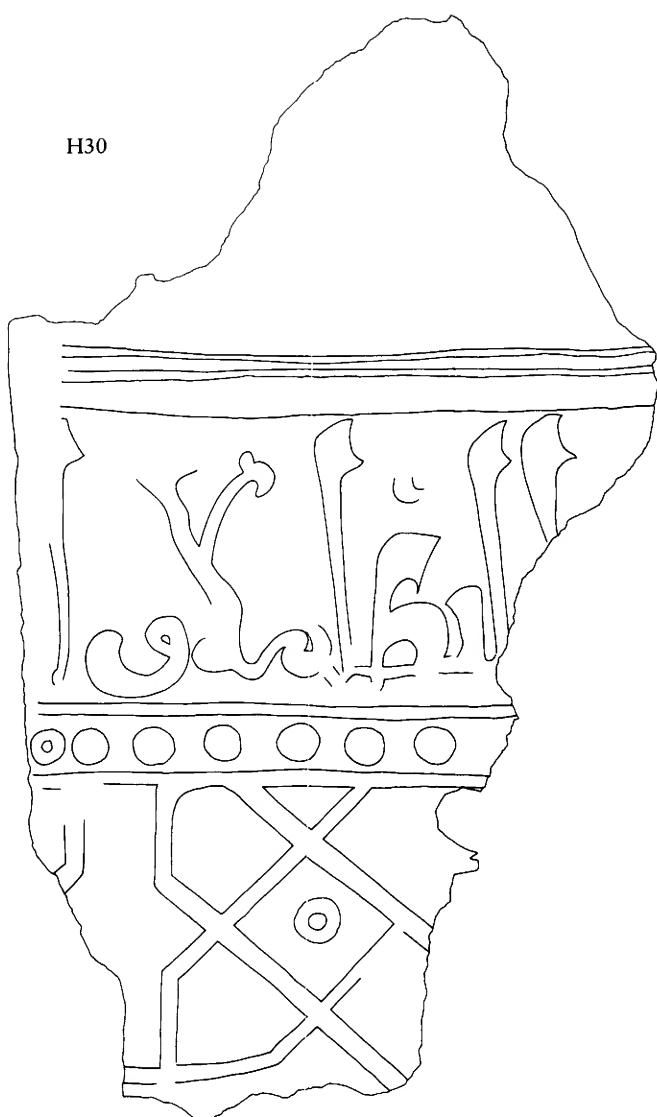
24

White on black with a thin red line at the top. A band of disks above a geometric network of polygonal shapes containing small spots and rings and disks encircled by spots.



H26



*Series H continued*

25

Plain white.

26

Black, red, and white; the irregular space at the top, which is 8 cm high, is black, the borders are white on black. Free-flowing Arabic script, almost entirely eroded, set between two bands of disks. The decoration below seems to have been either an archway or a circle; there is some confusion in the tracing. Two semi-circular bands remain, the outer one filled with entwined stems, the inner with a series of rings. Practically nothing is left of the decoration the bands enclosed.

27

White on black. Eroded save for a band of disks at the top.

28

Plain white.

29

Plain black.

30

White on black with two thin red lines at the top. A border of disks separates a band of Arabic inscription from the main design, which is of a geometric nature and calls to mind patterns executed in carved brick (see Figures 1.90–1.92 and Schroeder, "Seljuq Period," pp. 1035–45, fig. 374).

## APPENDIX II *Laboratory Report on the Treatment of a Fragment of Painted Plaster from the Qanat Tepe Bathhouse*

AN ISLAMIC FRESCO fragment (Metropolitan Museum of Art 48.101.177) was submitted to the laboratory for separation of its three painted layers.

### *The Uppermost Layer*

The painted decoration consists of a red area separated from a gray area by a black line. Yellow underpainting is visible in both the red and the gray areas.

The paint-support layer is a lime plaster with some fine sand mixed in. Under magnification the plaster-paint interface shows some bleeding of the color into the plaster, indicating that the painting was not done *a secco* with an organic binding medium. The absence of brushstrokes or texture in the plaster, however, points away from true fresco as the method of paint application. Thus, it seems most likely that the pigments were ground in limewater and then applied to the almost dry plaster.

*Strappo* (removing only the color layer) was selected as the technique for removing the design because it would have the least possible effect on the underlying paint layer. Before attempting the strappo it was necessary to remove the calcareous incrustations and surface dirt that covered the paint film. A thixotropic paste (Mora and Mora, "Metodo per la rimozione di incrostazioni") consisting of

H <sub>2</sub> O	500	ml
NH <sub>4</sub> HCO <sub>3</sub>	15	g
NaHCO <sub>3</sub>	25	g
carboxymethyl cellulose	30	g
10% Orvus (an anionic detergent)/H <sub>2</sub> O	5	ml
thymol (a fungicide)	0.5	g

was applied to the surface and left on for an hour, after which the incrustations were soft enough to be scraped away without damage.

The paint layer was consolidated with 7% AYAA/alcohol on one half and with 1:1 white shellac/alcohol on the other. These films were left to dry overnight at room temperature.

A facing of cheesecloth and canvas was applied with Franklin hide glue (plus a few drops of acetic acid). The excess fabric on the sides was taped to the bench top so that when the glue contracted the facing would remain in close contact with the paint layer.

After twenty-four hours the glue was dry, but had not contracted. Strappo was attempted; unfortunately, the facings peeled right off without any of the paint. This

was attributed to the plasticizers in the commercial hide glue, which prevent it from contracting and picking up the pigment.

A second facing of cheesecloth and canvas was applied with a thick solution of flake hide glue in water, taped down to the bench, and left overnight. Strappo was performed with success only on the shellac half. Evidently the hide glue did not adhere to the side consolidated in the AYAA.

The AYAA was removed with alcohol from the remaining portion and another facing applied on the clean plaster, this time with 12 g flake hide glue in 60 ml water. After overnight drying strappo was attempted, with failure. Apparently this time the concentration of hide glue was too weak. (Another reason for the resistance of this half of the fragment to treatment became obvious only after all the layers were exposed; see below.)

Strappo was abandoned in favor of *stacco* (removal of the entire plaster layer). To consolidate the remaining half, 10% B-72/xylene was painted on and left overnight. A two-layer cheesecloth facing was applied with 25% B-72/xylene. Stacco was done successfully using a flexible spatula. Care was taken to avoid digging into the layer beneath.

The two halves of the uppermost layer were reinforced on the back with a thin layer of DAP spackling compound. The cheesecloth facing was removed with xylene. The edges of the spackle were then carved down so that the pieces could be matched up. B-72 was used to adhere the halves at touching points. Spackle, reinforced with cheesecloth, was used to coat the back and hold the halves together as well as to fill losses from the front.

Inpainting can be done in watercolor.

### *The Middle Layer*

The design consists of an orange layer divided into five stripes by black lines, and a gray area on either side.

The structure of the middle layer is the same as that of the uppermost one. Stacco was selected as the method of paint removal.

The paint was consolidated with 2% B-72/xylene. A double layer of cheesecloth was applied as a facing using 25% B-72/xylene.

Stacco was performed in the manner already described.

As in the uppermost layer, the left half was removed without difficulty, while the right half was very resistant to the spatula chisel.

After stacco the reverse was filled with spackle and sanded down. The cheesecloth facing was removed with xylene. Losses in the front were filled. Inpainting will be done in watercolor.

### *The Bottom Layer*

After removal of the overlying layers, the state of the bottom layer revealed the cause of the difficulties encountered on the one side in both strappo and stacco. On the right side of the bottom layer was a thick deposit of very hard calcareous accretion. This may be the result of a wet spot in the wall, which caused dissolution

and redeposition of carbonate. This deposited carbonate acted as a pervasive cement, causing the surprising and unexpected adherence of one layer to another. Since the effectiveness of strappo or stacco depends primarily on the separation of layers, any cementing agent acting after the layers were laid down would naturally tend to inhibit the effectiveness of both methods.

Removal of the bottom paint layer was not attempted. However, the thixotropic paste mentioned above was employed for the removal of some of the calcareous accretions.

LYNDA AUSSENBERG, *Research Laboratory*  
DIANE DWYER, *Paintings Conservation*

The Metropolitan Museum of Art  
April 17, 1975

GLOSSARY  
BIBLIOGRAPHY  
INDEX



# *Glossary*

<b>ab-anbar</b>	a cistern or reservoir; in Nishapur, ab-anbars were contained in underground brick structures
<b>ajur</b>	baked (kiln-dried) brick
<b>chineh</b>	trodden earth used to build walls
<b>gatch</b>	plaster
<b>hauz</b>	a pool or water tank
<b>iwan</b>	an arched niche opening into a courtyard
<b>kahgil</b>	a mixture of earth, straw, water, and urine that is smoothed over walls built of khisht or chineh
<b>khisht</b>	sun-dried brick
<b>kucheh</b>	an alleyway
<b>kursi</b>	a chair or throne; in Iran, also a wooden frame placed over a charcoal fire and covered with quilts under which several people can warm their legs
<b>liwan</b>	a low, raised seating platform built along a wall
<b>madraseh</b>	a place for instruction, usually theological; buildings in madrasehs vary in size and plan and may include a library and tombs
<b>masjid-i-jami'</b>	a congregational mosque, also called a Friday mosque, where Muslims gather to pray, especially on Friday, when the sermon includes prayers for the ruler of the age (from the Arabic masjid, "place for prostration," and jami', "gathering")
<b>mihrab</b>	a prayer niche, often arched or cusped, so oriented that the worshiper who faces it looks in the direction of Mecca

<b>mukarna</b>	a small, arched, concave element used to fill a squinch or any other transition between a corner and a dome
<b>qanat</b>	an underground aqueduct, sometimes passing through an ab-anbar
<b>qibleh</b>	the point to which worshipers face when praying
<b>sarruj</b>	hard, waterproof plaster
<b>tepe</b>	a hill or mound
<b>zir-i-zamin</b>	an underground room or cellar

For simplicity's sake Arabic and Persian words and phrases have been transliterated using only 'ayns and hamzas. Because more than one person assisted with reading inscriptions, and because the author wished to retain some spellings that were current during the 1930s and 1940s, some inconsistencies may occur.

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